

THE QUEST FOR AN EXPERIENTIAL JESUS: RE-AUTHORIZING
THE BIBLE BY BUILDING COMMUNITY TRUST
THROUGH BIBLICAL STORYTELLING

Brice Arnold Thomas

Bachelor of Arts, Wright State University, 1995
Masters of Divinity, United Theological Seminary, 2004

Mentors

Thomas Boomershine, Ph.D.
Lisa Hess, Ph.D.

A FINAL PROJECT SUBMITTED TO
THE DOCTORAL STUDIES COMMITTEE
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
Dayton, Ohio
May 2015

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	vi
EPIGRAPH.....	vii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	viii
DEDICATION.....	x
ABBREVIATIONS.....	xi
TABLE OF FIGURES.....	xii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTERS	
1. MINISTRY FOCUS.....	8
Beyond Doubting Thomas: A Spiritual Autobiography	
Context Analysis	
Synergy Between Researcher and Context	
2. HISTORY OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION.....	39
The Eclipse of the Biblical Narrative	
The Bankruptcy of the Biblical Critical Paradigm	
Toward a New Paradigm of Biblical Study	
3. PERFORMANCE CRITICISM AS EXEGETICAL PARADIGM.....	51
The Medium of the Message	
Performance Criticism as Hermeneutic	
A Performance Criticism Exegesis	
Impact of Biblical Storytelling Hermeneutic	

4.	DIMENSIONS OF THE HERMENEUTIC.....	73
	Process Theology as Theological Dimension	
	The Dimension of “Meaning as Experience”	
	The Impact of Social Memory	
	Applicability to Biblical Storytelling	
5.	THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS.....	86
	The Theory of Storytelling	
	The Function of Storytelling	
	The Thirteen Healing Powers of Story	
6.	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	104
	Transformative Learning Methodology	
	Project Design	
	The Emergent Worship Paradigm	
	Summary of Data Collection Methods	
	Adaptation of Transformative Learning for Data Analysis	
7.	FIELD EXPERIENCE.....	120
	Summary of the Model Implementation	
	Demographics of Overall Participants	
	Data Analysis of Harmony Creek Church Participants	
	Data Analysis of Seminary Participants	
	Data Analysis of Participants by Generational Demographics	

8.	SUMMARY, REFLECTION AND CONCLUSIONS.....	161
	Summary of Data Analysis	
	Evidence of Transformative Learning	
	Reflections on the Biblical Storytelling Experience	
	Process Theology as Interpretive Lens for “Meaning as Experience”	
	Conclusions: Reauthorizing Scripture for Progressive Christians	
9.	NEW QUESTS FOR AN EXPERIENTIAL JESUS.....	180
	The Doctor of Ministry Program as Transformative Learning	
	Next Steps for Research	
	The Future of Biblical Storytelling in Digital Culture	
APPENDICES (ON ENCLOSED DVD)		
A.	SYMPOSIUM SCHEDULES	
B.	WORSHIP BULLETINS	
C.	WORSHIP RESOURCES	
D.	SURVEYS AND FACILITATOR DATA	
E.	SOCIAL MEDIA DATA	
F.	MULTI-MEDIA	
G.	VIDEOS (ON USB FLASH DRIVE)	
	BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	193

ABSTRACT

THE QUEST FOR AN EXPERIENTIAL JESUS: RE-AUTHORIZING THE BIBLE BY BUILDING COMMUNITY TRUST THROUGH BIBLICAL STORYTELLING

by

Brice Arnold Thomas
United Theological Seminary, 2015

Mentors

Thomas Boomershine, Ph.D.
Lisa Hess, Ph.D.

The purpose of this project was the re-authorization of the Bible as an essential component for spiritual formation in a progressive Christian context. The objective was the application of a new hermeneutic called “meaning as experience;” where the biblical narratives are no longer seen as a referential document or a book of ideas but as foundational for new meaning-making. Strategies included integrating biblical storytelling into the worship liturgy and experimentation with new pedagogical methods for spiritual formation based on performance criticism. The building of community trust toward those ends was identified as the principal impact of the project.

“A new teaching—with authority!”
—Mark 1.27

Authorization

God, you give me authority to heal,
to confront evil, to reveal your grace.
I embrace the role you give me.

Expertise

Jesus knew what he was talking about,
and his acts and words harmonized.
May I live out your true delight.

Power

You gave Jesus power to resist evil,
power to effect change.
I accept the power you give me.

Authenticity

Jesus did not teach a list of beliefs,
but gave of himself.
Help me to be authentic and present.

Authoring

Jesus wrote a new story in people's lives.
Use me to create anew,
to write a new page in the story of your love.

By your Spirit in me
help me be
your living, authentic teaching.

Steve Garnaas-Holmes
Unfolding Light
www.unfoldinglight.net

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Without the help of my context associates at Harmony Creek Church, this project would not have been possible. Many thanks to Eric Nash, Kenny Roaden, Steve Sackman, Emily Kronenberger, Tesia Mallory, Kathy Swensen, Sue Voisard, Linda Marshall, Caleb Alexander, and the many facilitators and participants in this research. Revs. Michael Castle and Ruth Hopkins for their support, enthusiasm, and leadership at Harmony Creek, and for their belief in me as a pastor and biblical storyteller.

I am grateful to the faculty and staff at United Theological Seminary for their feedback and support of my work, and the many seminary students and campus community members who provided valuable perspectives for this research. A special thanks to Tesia Mallory who helped design and create my project website, www.ExperientialJesus.com, and for editing the numerous hours of video footage into a ten minute promotional movie to introduce my research to the world. She is an amazing gift to me and to the church!

I also appreciate my partner, Wayne Furay, very much for taking care of our domestic life together during the three years of being sequestered in my office creating and completing this research.

And I must acknowledge my furry children: Jack and Pooh, Banzai, Riley, Millie and Buddy, for their constant and determined “urging” to take a break from time to time—and just . . . play!

And last, but certainly not least, I must acknowledge the incredible contribution that my mentor, Dr. Thomas Boomershine, has made to the field of performance criticism, to this project and to my evolution as an academic and biblical storyteller. His groundbreaking research and writings have had a deep theological impact on my understanding of the original audiences and storytellers of the ancient world. Throughout these three years of doctoral study I have been continually amazed at his insight, intellect and love of the biblical narratives. Tom introduced and invited me to take a truly life-giving journey from theological deconstruction to a reformation of and reconnection to the sacred stories of my faith.

But more importantly, Tom was an agent of reconciliation between me and Jesus. For me, Tom embodies the very mission and ministry of Jesus the Christ. My deconstruction resulting in a cognitive dissonance from the testimony of Jesus had created barriers between my head and heart, and it was Tom that called me into a new relationship with Christ, who represents the God of Presence in me and in the world. This reconciliation has revealed a new vision for my call, and a hopeful future for ministry to the progressive Church.

Tom has also been a Father to me. After the death of my Dad at the age of three, my search for the kind of Father figure that could see my potential and acknowledge my worthiness and value as a unique and beloved child of God seemed unattainable. But Tom's love and commitment to me, and to all of my student peers, has redeemed the image of "God the Father" for my spiritual life. That redemption has been the greatest unforeseen gift of this project. I pray that I can be the same for those who join me on my journey with a relational God and an experiential Jesus. I am truly blessed and beloved!

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the spiritual teachers and sojourners who have guided me and walked with me along my faith journey (in reverse chronological order):

Tom Boomershine	Amy Pawlus	Timothy Forbess
Carolyn Bohler	Barbara Condron	Betty Cox
Steve Garnaas-Holmes	Cathy Anna	Stephen Richey-Suttles
Amelia Boomershine	Patty Whitling	Donna Richey-Suttles
Ron Poisel	Elizabeth Horton	Dan Young
Meghan Howard	Terry Tyson	Sue Voisard
Joyce Johnson	Amy Miller	Keith Haithcock
Kathy Culmer	Sharon Trekkel	Sharon Mack Temple
Elizabeth Green	Bill Youngkin	Ron Eckberg
Robbie Collins	Anne McWilliams	Michael Castle
Janice Kemp	Andrew Park	Wayne Furay
Vivian Johnson	Ty Inbody	William Loudermilk
Scott Kisker	Tom Dozeman	Penny West-Hagan
Felicia Laboy	Kathy Farmer	Rebekah Devilbiss
Dan Gildner	Larry Wellborn	Matthew Thomas
Tesia Mallory	Dick Eslinger	Elissa McBee
Bridget Weatherspoon	Elise Eslinger	Bessie Thomas
Evan Abl	Leroy Chambliss	Flora Jean Long
Marilyn Evans	Ted Zaragoza	Arnold Thomas
Jim Eller	Gary Eubank	Jesus the Christ
Ruth Hopkins	Ed Zeiders	Abba God

ABBREVIATIONS

HCC—Harmony Creek Church

UCC—United Church of Christ

C4—Cross Creek Community Church

NRSV—New Revised Standard Version

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1.	Gender make up of overall participants	126
Figure 2.	Generational demographics of overall participants	127
Figure 3.	Denominational affiliations of overall participants	128
Figure 4.	Gender make up of HCC participants	128
Figure 5.	Generational demographics of HCC participants	129
Figure 6.	Church membership status of HCC participants	129
Figure 7.	Frequency of reading scripture prior to project session for HCC	130
Figure 8.	Beliefs about God by HCC participants	131
Figure 9.	Authority of the Bible for HCC participants	132
Figure 10.	View of biblical storytelling prior to service	133
Figure 11.	View of biblical storytelling after the service	133
Figure 12.	Recalling sacred stories after the service	134
Figure 13.	Impact of biblical storytelling on HCC participants	134
Figure 14.	Barriers to engaging biblical storytelling for HCC participants	136
Figure 15.	Intent for biblical storytelling as spiritual discipline for HCC	137
Figure 16.	Intent for learning biblical stories by heart for HCC focus group	137
Figure 17.	Gender make up of seminary students	138
Figure 18.	Generational demographics of seminary students	138
Figure 19.	Denominational affiliations of seminary students	139
Figure 20.	Beliefs about God by seminary students	140
Figure 21.	Authority of the Bible for seminary students	141

Figure 22.	Frequency of memorizing scripture prior to service for students	141
Figure 23.	View of biblical storytelling prior to service for students	142
Figure 24.	View of biblical storytelling after the service for students	143
Figure 25.	Impact of biblical storytelling on seminary students	144
Figure 26.	Barriers to engaging biblical storytelling for seminary students	145
Figure 27.	Intent for biblical storytelling as spiritual discipline for students	146
Figure 28.	Beliefs about God by Silent Generation	148
Figure 29.	Authority of the Bible for Silent Generation	149
Figure 30.	Impact of biblical storytelling on Silent Generation	149
Figure 31.	Barriers to engaging biblical storytelling for Silent Generation	150
Figure 32.	Beliefs about God by Baby Boomers	151
Figure 33.	Authority of the Bible for Baby Boomers	152
Figure 34.	Impact of biblical storytelling on Baby Boomers	152
Figure 35.	Barriers to engaging biblical storytelling for Baby Boomers	153
Figure 36.	Beliefs about God by Generation X	154
Figure 37.	Authority of the Bible for Generation X	155
Figure 38.	Impact of biblical storytelling on Generation X	155
Figure 39.	Barriers to engaging biblical storytelling for Generation X	156
Figure 40.	Beliefs about God by Millennials	157
Figure 41.	Authority of the Bible for Millennials	158
Figure 42.	Impact of biblical storytelling on Millennials	158
Figure 43.	Barriers to engaging biblical storytelling for Millennials	159

INTRODUCTION

An analysis of the post-modern, theologically progressive context, Harmony Creek Church (hereafter HCC), revealed that many in the congregation remained in “exile” from a life-giving connection to sacred biblical texts. The exegetical processes of historical and source criticism, specifically the engagement of the “Quest for the Historical Jesus” movement, have had significant impact. The community leadership’s engagement of these exegetical processes has had positive effect for many, such as the deconstruction of harmful and oppressive biblical texts. However, this engagement has also resulted in a disconnection from the Bible as an authoritative resource for spiritual formation. For many engaged in this quest, biblical authority has yet to be restored or replaced. They had yet to encounter “a new way of seeing that welcomed the Bible as a sacrament and a conversation partner, and restored its authority grounded not in God but in this progressive community’s sacred trust.”¹ This was the primary problem addressed by this research project.

The purpose of this project was the re-authorization of the Bible as an essential component for spiritual formation in a progressive Christian context. The objective was the application of a new hermeneutic called “meaning as experience,” where the biblical

¹Michael D. Castle, “In the Midst of New Dimensions: A Call for Theological Education in the Churches that Looks to the Historical Jesus to Bridge the Divide Between Academic Understandings and Christian Practice” (D. Min. thesis, Eden Theological Seminary, 2001), 53.

narratives are no longer engaged as a referential document or a book of ideas but as the medium for making new meaningful experiences and nurturing spiritual growth. Strategies included the creation of a new emergent worship service called “Symposium” that engaged biblical storytelling in worship liturgy, and experimented with new pedagogical methods for spiritual formation based on performance criticism. Symposium integrated various practice of faith formation and reflection through spiritual disciplines and emergent worship elements grounded in a relaxed coffee house atmosphere. A variety of biblical themes were engaged to address a “hermeneutic of suspicion” and create new ways of seeing that welcomed the Bible as a sacrament and conversation partner. Could this welcoming partnership resolve the detachment from the Bible and reconnect progressive Christians living in spiritual exile? This emergent worship experience was the primary medium proposed for the project.

The deepening of community trust in the Bible was the most significant impact of engaging biblical storytelling in worship. Data collection utilized a phenomenological methodology through pre and post surveys, interviews, observation of workshop participants, focus group processing, analyzing data for significant statements of experiential learning, and utilizing the arts to describe the essence of the experience. Participants investigated, observed and studied biblical stories of justice, healing and restoration, and engaged in experiential responses. Study materials included background on the history of storytelling in oral cultures and literature about the performance features of story, storyteller, and audience address. Performance Criticism (the exegetical process in biblical storytelling) was engaged to discern the ancient audience’s original experience

of the stories and to develop questions of inquiry that enabled participants to make personal life connections to the biblical narratives.

This investigation of biblical storytelling as a renewing hermeneutical approach to biblical study and spiritual formation in a progressive context began with this question:

How can the Christian faith, first experienced and symbolically articulated in an ancient culture now long out-of-date, speak meaningfully to human existence today as we experience it amid a worldview dominated by natural science, secular self-understanding, and the worldwide cry for freedom?²

This question grounded the inquiry into the absence of biblical authority in progressive contexts. Evaluating the impact of performance criticism as a means to reauthorize the biblical narrative as a transformative exegetical method led to deeper discernment of the embedded theology (or lack thereof) within project participants.

Systematic theologian Ted Peters suggests that holistic thinking (the desire for synthesis or integration) and hypothetical reconstruction (incorporating doubt and a pluralism of perspectives into a community of meaning) are the means for developing a postmodern theological framework.³ Peters asserts that the procedure for this development is found in the explication of biblical symbols.⁴ He suggests that the next step that must be pursued is a “theological method that assumes that both ancient and modern understandings belong to a single and more inclusive tradition history—to a single story—and that this tradition-history will eventually participate in the one

²Ted Peters, *God, The World's Future: Systematic Theology for a New Era* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 7.

³Peters, *God*, 32.

⁴ Peters, *God*, 36.

comprehensive story of humankind on earth.”⁵ Therefore, the basic symbols that are tied to the original experience of the revelation from God are irreplaceable and untranslatable and have the protean power to emit new meaning in new contexts.

While this exploration of a “new way of seeing” existed in a variety of ways at HCC, this project proposed the application of a biblical storytelling paradigm as a means of integrating biblical study with emergent worship. If the context participants were to fully experience the integration of faith formation and worship, they needed the biblical stories to come alive. The engagement of biblical storytelling and performance criticism for the project participants was an effective mechanism by which these basic symbols could emit new meaning in new contexts.

This research is presented over nine chapters. Chapter one defines the area of ministry in which the research was accomplished beginning with my spiritual autobiography. The chapter then provides an analysis of the project’s context including historical and background information. Definition of the community’s progressive identity and summary of previous theological research accomplished by its ministerial leadership is summarized. The chapter also addresses the assessment of the absence of biblical authority in progressive contexts and concludes with a summary of the synergy between my spiritual journey and the context.

Chapter two presents the history of biblical interpretation from the Enlightenment culture to the present as “meaning as reference.” The chapter summarizes the “Quest for the Historical Jesus” movement and subsequent disagreements presented in the writings of Hans Frei, Walter Wink, and Thomas Boomershine. The chapter then addresses the

⁵Peters, *God*, 16.

challenge for identifying a new paradigm for the interpretation of the Bible in digital culture by identifying differences between interpreting the biblical narratives from a “meaning as ideal reference” and “meaning as ostensive reference.”

Chapter three proposes performance criticism as a new exegetical paradigm for discerning the meaning of the biblical story in its original historical context. A dimension of this hermeneutic is a re-conception of the Bible as stories that were told to audiences rather than written as texts for readers. The chapter concludes with a presentation of this hermeneutic for biblical interpretation grounded in “meaning as experience.” The hermeneutic is then applied to the story of Jesus and the Canaanite woman from the gospel of Matthew with the intent to explore its original meaning for the first audiences of the Gospels. A perspective of “Audience Address” is utilized to evaluate these meanings for a postmodern progressive Christian context.

Chapter four investigates two dimensions of this new hermeneutic. The first dimension, process theology, is proposed as a theological method for redefining relationship with—and a connection to—a relational God and an experiential Jesus. It proposes a way of connecting the original experience of the story to the experience of a post-modern contemporary audience. Process thought, as a dimension of this new hermeneutic, invites the hearer to connect to the stories in a relational way. This redefined relationship is then explored as the theological method for spiritual formation in progressive contexts. Another dimension of the hermeneutic is its ability to reinterpret the biblical narratives with a “meaning as experience” hermeneutic. The chapter presents social memory theory as a paradigm for understanding the connection (or disconnection) of the biblical narratives to communities of faith. It discerns the impact of this paradigm

on the progressive Church, and proposes a “meaning as experience” hermeneutic for reconnection.

Chapter five outlines storytelling as a theoretical foundation for translating “meaning as experience” into pedagogical strategies for reconnection and spiritual formation. These fourteen healing powers of story provide the theoretical framework for constructing activities of meaning-making for project participants, and understanding their responses to this experience presented in chapter seven.

Chapter six offers transformative learning as the research methodology for the project, and identifies what happens when someone's perspective is transformed from this relational paradigm. The chapter details the history and processes of self-directed learning and critical self-reflection, its application for creating and evaluating mechanisms for spiritual growth during the project and its viability for perspective transformation and new meaning-making for participants. An explanation of the project model defines emergent worship as the environment for engaging transformational learning in the progressive context. The chapter concludes with a summary of these methods used for data collection and data analysis.

Chapter seven presents the data collected during field experience. The chapter also records reflections about what happened during the implementation of the project, followed by the results of exploring new paradigms of biblical authority for progressive Christians in the design, implementation and evaluation of an emergent worship experience that was grounded in the biblical storytelling hermeneutic of performance criticism. The chapter outlines the project's collection of data, analysis of that data, and

initial outcomes. Results of surveys, interviews, responses to reflective activities, and phenomenological observations are included.

Chapter eight includes reflections on this field experience, a summary of the data analysis, the impact of the project on the participants and conclusions drawn from the data analysis. The chapter then connects the biblical storytelling paradigm to the dynamics of transformative learning and perspective transformation in the medium of a progressive community, and the resulting re-authorization of the biblical narratives from this new meaning-making.

Chapter nine proposes the possibilities of further research for introducing biblical storytelling to progressive Christian contexts and other communities of inquiry. A comparison of the data between various generational demographics to the overall sampling is presented as a step toward that research. Enabling these participants to embed these stories in their social memory is an opportunity for future research and the establishment of new global networks toward that end.

The appendices (see Contents), located on the enclosed DVD, provide documentation of project schedules, worship bulletins, pre-and post-survey questions, social media and multi-media data, facilitator feedback, resources used in the creation of the biblical storytelling worship service (PowerPoint, Lumicon, workshop presentations) and photos documenting the experience. Additionally, a collection of video vignettes of the worship services and project participant interviews can be found on the enclosed USB Flash Drive. An interactive website, www.ExperientialJesus.com, houses these resources plus additional videos and worship planning ideas for duplicating this project in other settings.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

The search for making new meanings of the basic symbols of the Christian faith was begun eighteen years ago in the progressive context of HCC and in the context's denomination, the United Church of Christ (UCC). Over these nearly two decades many efforts had been attempted at harmonizing a fundamentalist experience of God that was grounded in a literalist interpretation of scripture through a progressive theological quest. What began as a rejection of a classical theistic view of God led to an investigation of the historical Jesus in order to demystify the grip of classical theism.¹ That investigation was followed by theological education in seminary and an embrace of process theology to contextualize faith in the post-modern era. Yet the primary hermeneutical method for this investigation remained enveloped by a "meaning as reference" hermeneutic, a study of the Bible as a source of referential information about biblical history and theology. The biblical narratives had yet to speak meaningfully to the post-modern human experience. They no longer seemed relevant.

So the search continued outside traditional Christian orthodoxy, including a study of metaphysics, interfaith religious practice and new thought spirituality in an attempt to replace the authority that scripture once held with other sacred texts. Throughout these

¹Classical Theism is the view that there is a God which is the creator and sustainer of the universe and is unlimited with regard to knowledge (omniscience), power (omnipotence), extension (omnipresence) and moral perfection. Though regarded as sexless, God has traditionally been referred to by the masculine pronoun. James Fieser and Bradley Dowden, eds., *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, "Western Concepts of God," accessed March 15, 2015, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/god-west>.

processes I journeyed through the identities of doubter, Gnostic, metaphysician, religious pluralist and Religious Science practitioner. Yet never had a passion for faith and the study of sacred biblical texts been ignited to the level experienced in religious fundamentalism (pre-deconstruction phase). Perhaps this is because what was “fundamental theology” existed as a way of life, not just a course of spiritual study.

This journey through biblical/historical criticism and the demystifying of biblical narratives has also shaped much of the experience of the progressive Christian community at HCC. Their way of thinking and talking about Christian theology has been defined and shaped, not by a theological understanding of God or grounded in the authority of the biblical narrative for spiritual formation, but through a deconstruction of Jesus Christ and their experience of God in relation to the quest for the historical Jesus. The movement away from orthodoxy has demanded that they resist approaching theology as an expression of faith in the God which exclusively reveals Godself in Jesus of Nazareth by the power of the Holy Spirit, and as a discipline with its own special critical methods that are appropriate to understanding the God who is known in relation to humanity in Jesus of Nazareth.² They have been emboldened to question whether the Christian faith is concerned with delivering those questions that help us most in our quest if it also restricts asking only certain questions.³ Dissonance between fundamentalist Christian theology and progressive spirituality has caused many to reject the orthodox testimony of Christian scripture as exclusive and culturally conservative. However, the freedom to search, to wander in exile, and to love and trust as able has inspired this

²Peters, *God*, 45.

³Peters, *God*, 52.

researcher to seek a much deeper and life-giving relationship with God than ever before. This research is a commitment to asking the questions, doubting the evidence, and investigating the greater and lesser stories. While this researcher and others in this progressive context are not ashamed of being in exile, we do not want to live there forever. This journey *is* our progressive faith process and there were many at HCC willing to engage that quest. My commitment to this quest has grown into a passion for guiding others into life-giving biblical study and spiritual growth.

Beyond Doubting Thomas: A Spiritual Autobiography

A Charismatic Childhood

I was born the eldest son of a Pentecostal minister in Dayton, Ohio in 1963. My father, Rev. Henry Arnold Thomas, was a faith healer and held camp meetings all over Ohio, Kentucky and Indiana in the early 1960s. His ministry as a faith healer and camp meeting evangelist was a legacy that had a significant influence on my siblings and me. Growing up in the early 1960s under this legacy provided numerous incredible and dramatic events. Categorized as the holiness movement in his time, and later as charismatic by the modern church, my childhood experiences were framed by: miraculous healings, evidence of the Holy Spirit through speaking in tongues and prophetic messages, a separation from the secular world and humanistic ideals, a skepticism of modern science and technological advances in medicine, and a community of legalistic codes and creeds. The strict adherence to this belief system pervaded every aspect of our lives.

My father's camp meeting revivals were amazing events. I remember the smell of sawdust being kicked around as righteous women, their hair piled a foot high on top of their heads, went screaming and shouting under the power of the "Holy Ghost." Hairpins became projectiles as their bodies convulsed, jerking their heads back and forth in whiplash motion. Some of the men would take to running around the tent, overturning chairs in their path as they leaped high into the air. It was an emotional time and influential in my spiritual worship formation. But his legacy was not who or how he healed, but that he believed God's healing grace was available to everyone. He practiced that kind of grace in his own ministry and in his relationships—and was known for his charismatic love and care for people.

My father's charismatic faith healing ministry and its underlying doctrinal prohibitions prevented him from seeking medical treatment when he was diagnosed with Melanoma cancer shortly after my younger brother was born in 1964. It was the common belief among Pentecostals in that day (and some today) that God would heal people from their illness only if it was God's will; that was all that you needed. To seek medical treatment was a denial of God's power to heal and was considered a sin and exposed a lack of faith. My father relied on the power of God's grace to heal him from cancer, and I am sure he believed that God would. However, my father died in 1966 from this cancer. He was thirty years old and I was three.

A 'Pentecostal' Way of Life

When my father was not healed of skin cancer and later died as it spread throughout his body, the church concluded that he and my mother just did not have enough faith, or perhaps there was sin in our lives. Some even suggested that God had a

greater purpose for my father, so God took him up to heaven, as if raising three children was not a great enough purpose for him. After his death, our faith journey continued in this conservative tradition, and our family started singing together and spreading the gospel through music and song at various churches throughout the area.

My childhood led way to teenage years full of church camp, Bible study, practicing the gifts of the Spirit and other hallmarks of charismatic discipleship. Participating in the rituals of my Pentecostal heritage included dancing in the Spirit, speaking in my own angelic tongue and even exercising the gifts of interpretation and prophecy. I believed what I heard and saw, and understood God to be jealous, warrior-like, almighty, omniscient and punishing. Sexuality was something to be controlled and subdued. It was sinful behavior at its core, unless of course it was within the legal bonds of marriage. The Christian school that I attended from the first grade through high school reinforced this belief system. Yet my sexual awakening brought new questions to ponder. Between the summer of my eighth grade and freshman year I grew over seven inches. I shot up from 4' 10" to 5' 5". My sexual awakening exploded overnight. How could my sexuality be so wrong? I had several girlfriends and enjoyed popularity as one of the "in crowd." Yet my fear of punishment kept me from any sexual exploration.

Relationships with my family became steadily distant. I found myself working a lot and participating in as many extracurricular activities as possible. During this time I discovered my love for art and drama. My experience of the stage was both exhilarating and exciting. Embodying different roles in the theater helped me forget the tension of living my awkward life and wearing the mask of Christianity. My first role on the stage was in the musical "The King and I," where I played the character Simon Legree who

wore a real mask on stage. This play followed with leading roles in “My Fair Lady,” “The Miracle Worker,” “Fiddler on the Roof,” and regular performances on the drama team. My passion for acting and singing became a journey to express outwardly what I wanted to be on the inside. I was someone special on stage. I was a talented and creative artist. I was able to attract attention and intimacy, something that seemed lost or unattainable at home.

Although I excelled in music and theater, questions of my future were still raised. I was intent on attending a Christian college somewhere away from home. I was anxious to leave this small town and conservative minded people. But I remember being uncertain about God’s calling. Was I called to follow in the footsteps of my father and continue his ministry—or was God calling me somewhere else? Should I be a pastor, missionary, or musician? I listen to old tapes of my father preaching and wonder at his biblical insight and prophetic teachings—even by today’s standards. These thoughts clouded my mind as I neared graduation from high school. But the decision to continue my education was made by my parents—college was not an option. Because my stepfather had custody of his own three children and with my mother had a daughter of their own, this created a hardship for my family—having to feed seven children on blue collar wages. Higher education was not a possibility, so I was offered two choices—continue to work a minimum wage job or enlist in the military. I chose the latter, and began a new life away from the security and rigidity of a Christian home. The Air Force was my new family and they taught me a lot about living in the “real” world.

Not Just a Way of Life, but an Adventure

I began to live into my own identity once I left home. I was able to get out from under a restrictive religious upbringing, and experience who I really was as my own person. I enlisted as a Russian Cryptolinguist, basically a techno-spy. I was trained to intercept, translate and analyze Russian aircraft communications. It was a fascinating job. The camaraderie and intellectual stimulation was exciting. I tried very hard to be a Christian while in the service, but by the time I arrived at my first duty station in West Berlin, Germany a whole new world had been opened to me. It was there that I experienced all the vices of secular life—and fully indulged in their pleasures! I also became very active in theater through MWR, the military's department of Morale, Welfare and Recreation. I was cast as the lead in productions of "Grease," "A Christmas Carol," and "Hooters"; a coming of age story about a sexually inexperienced nerd who fell in love on spring break with a beautiful woman.

But it was during this time of sexual freedom, exploration and awakening that I began to sense something different about myself—that I was not oriented like other men. I recognized that I was gay. The resulting confusion from this awakening sent my spirituality into a tailspin. I knew from my conservative Christian upbringing that I could not be gay and Christian—but I chose this new lifestyle that I thought offered me freedom instead of the bondage of fundamentalism. Ironically, for the next six years I was plagued by the guilt of my "choice" and the abandonment of my call to ministry. During my six years in the military I was accused of being gay, subjected to polygraph and psychological testing, stripped of my top secret security clearance, and made an example during these occasional "witch-hunts" under Ronald Reagan's presidency.

However, even during this oppressive time I discovered authentic intimacy with a wonderful man I met in the army while performing in Berlin's annual German Volksfest Broadway Revue show.

My spiritual formation took a long hiatus during those years in the military and for several years after I was discharged. My suspicion of the fundamentalist belief system underscored my separation from organized religion. Once morality issues in my own life threatened my acceptance of this belief system, I found it necessary to reach a compromise of the conflicting issues. My first challenge was to investigate these experiences of my youth. What was real? What did I really experience—and in turn, what do I believe now? How have I come to understand these experiences in light of my own maturation? For a long time I believed that adherence to Christianity, at least to the religion that I had practiced since birth, demanded submission to and acceptance of this specific belief system. In order to reap the benefits of this belief system, obedience to all of the rules was required, especially the rules concerning sexual behavior.

Coming Out and Becoming Outcast

Like many gay men who grew up in Christianity, my coming "out" also triggered my expulsion from the community that nurtured me most. But that was okay I thought. The consequences of my actions came not from this ostracism, but from my own guilt and self-condemnation. I had been told repeatedly—and still felt that I was an abomination to God. The Bible was used as a weapon against me and was an agent of my exclusion. It was a life changing moment when the public recognition of my sexual identity excluded me from the church. I was at home during leave from the military with my first partner attending a service in my home church. During the altar call five or six

women in the church gathered around me and began casting demons out of me. It was an exorcism. I was horrified and embarrassed for my lover. After leaving home to return to my duty station I vowed to never worship that God again.

After my enlistment ended I spent the next year working at an amusement park as a singer and dancer in musical revues. I also traveled back to Europe for three months as the leader of a USO show called "Pickin' and Kickin'." Following that gig I was hired by a dinner cruise company in the D.C. area. That company took me to Chicago, L.A. and finally to New York opening new cruise ships as their food and beverage director. My first gay relationship ended heartbreakingly after four years, so I took some time to reconsider the lifestyle choices that I had made. Los Angeles and New York City were very difficult for me. The gay subculture was framed by promiscuity, drug abuse and isolation. I spent many nights sleeping with men whose first names I did not even know. Nearing a nervous breakdown, I resigned from the company and returned to Ohio in an attempt to reconcile with my family and God.

Back into the Closet

After I returned home I rejected my sexual orientation and returned to work in my home church. Soon thereafter I enrolled in a conservative Bible college in Dallas, Texas and began the long process of healing and "reconditioning" that I believed I needed. This process included numerous counseling sessions, aversion therapy, exorcisms, and attendance at various ex-gay ministries, support groups and retreats. I became active in a Christian theater company and experienced the relief of my oppressive anti-gay therapy by performing on stage. I was excited with the opportunity to act and sing in the company of other Christians. However, the director of the theater company was accused of

inappropriate behavior toward another male actor in the troupe and we suspended our performances. It was at this time that I approached the dean of my school and other faculty members, confused that my orientation remained unchanged after years of this reconditioning process. In fact, I proposed serious criticism of the theology that considered homosexuality an “abomination” and challenged the school to open up dialogue. They responded by expelling me, charging me “not to come back until I was fully healed.” Dejected, confused and broken I returned home—suicidal and more distant from God than ever before.

I admit that, at times, I laugh about these past experiences. Although terrifying at the time, I play back the scenario in my mind and wonder at the ignorance that fueled these exorcisms and other episodes of “aversion therapy.” These futile attempts at changing my sexual orientation gave me the incentive to search the scriptures and resolve some of the contradictions that have been used so vehemently to exclude gays and lesbians from the church. This search resolved the conflict within me even as I debated the issue with my own family over the years. I wrote a letter to my sister about my journey as a gay Christian. It was a significant step for me and a spark of healing and empowerment toward the development of a healthy gay Christian identity.

Academic Pursuits

In the fall of 1993, I decided to finish my undergraduate degree and began attending classes at Wright State University in Dayton. I enrolled in the International Studies and Religion programs and, for the first time, was introduced to alternative theologies about God. I was overcome with excitement and intrigue as I began a critical analysis of my own embedded theology and spirituality. It was in this academic

environment that I began to question the fundamental convictions of my childhood. I felt I had finally been freed to objectively analyze issues of theology surrounding my faith tradition and experience. I also performed in several professional theater productions over the next couple of years, and continued to look for understanding in higher education and enrolled at the McGregor School of Antioch University where I began an M.A. program in Conflict Resolution. It was an enlightening experience engaging this program and final thesis, but I was hoping to find answers about God through this research.

My thesis, "Identifying Conflict Structures in Gay & Lesbian Relationships," confirmed my own experience that it is extremely difficult to be an openly gay person and a practicing Christian. I found that the search for spirituality in gay relationships is often abandoned because of the unwelcoming and judgmental actions of nearly all Christian denominations. My research suggested that the unwelcoming church is one of the greatest sources of conflict in gay relationships. Whereas heterosexual couples can seek reconciliation for their relationship issues through their church pastors, gay couples have been ostracized. I found this issue present in my own relationship. I abandoned spiritual nurturing because I feared rejection of my identity as a gay man. Nevertheless, my search for spiritual truth and authentic pastoral care was enlivened by the UCC.

Open Doors and Affirming Hearts

Nearly twenty years ago I met a gay pastor and his partner who had been kicked out of the Southern Baptist church and were starting a new UCC congregation called Cross Creek Community Church. Their courage and commitment to Christ drew me back into the doors of spirituality and into the hearts of a community that genuinely cared for the gay community. I finally felt that my search for acceptance, from both God and

Christianity, was revealed within the walls of this small UCC congregation. The UCC was, for me, an anomaly. Here I had found straight and gay, white and black, people with abilities and disabilities, young and old, conservative and liberal—worshipping together. The love that I felt there was overwhelming. I'll never forget being drenched in the presence of God on that first Sunday. I was overcome with the power of their unconditional love as they spread their arms wide open to me with an open and affirming compassion I had never felt before. I immediately plunged into every ministry opportunity. I became a regular on the worship team, led a small ministerial group and continued to confront the issues of my sexuality that had separated me from God for so long. I eventually became the director of music—it seemed that everything was coming together for me in body, mind, and spirit—finally.

A Radical Love—A Radical God

But the journey did not end there, and it was the next two years that challenged my conception of God the most. It was at C4 that every belief system I held dear to me, regardless of the positive or negative effect it had on my life, was called into question. It began during the summer of 2000. My pastor, Mike Castle, began a series of sermons titled “Meeting Jesus Again,” following the work of the *Jesus Seminar* and his own doctoral studies. He was using C4 as a guinea pig of sorts, sharing his own journey of theological deconstruction and offering the alternative theological views of academics like Marcus Borg, Bishop Spong and Stephen Patterson. It was a risky endeavor on his part, for I and many others were shocked by what we were hearing, and even more confused by our own doubts as we began the deconstruction process. I entered into a “dark place,” similar to what the Spanish mystic John of the Cross described as the “dark

night of the soul.” I felt disconnected from God and the testimony of Jesus, and even considered leaving Christianity again, but this time for another religion that would make more sense to me. If all that I had believed as a child about the deity of Christ was nothing but another “perspective,” then why fight so hard to be in a relationship with a faith that by in large excluded me from the body of Christ?

In the midst of my frustration and disillusionment I received a word of encouragement from the prophet Jeremiah in the Old Testament. I was attending a small spiritual community group at C4 that met weekly during this time of theological deconstruction. The leaders of this spiritual community group, Donna and Steven Richey Suttles (a bi-sexual married couple), were my ideal understanding of Christians living out their faith in progressive ways. Their commitment to our group and authentic expression of love and affirmation provided the safe space for this exploration. They encouraged each member of the group to offer devotions before our discussion for the evening. I remember one night a wonderful and kind person led devotions, Betty Cox (who is a Lesbian). Betty passed out scripture promises to each of us. It was at about this time that I was in the deepest internal controversy over the direction of my faith journey. I was having such a hard time embracing a progressive approach to Christianity and was considering leaving the church. The scripture promise I was randomly given came from Jeremiah 29:11, 13.

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope . . . When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart (NRSV).⁴

⁴All Bible quotes are from the *New Revised Standard Version* unless otherwise noted.

My heart melted at that moment and an honest and emotional conversation followed that resulted in a renewed commitment to my faith. The loving embrace of this small group of lay leaders beckoned me to stay faithful to this journey as they remained present with me throughout. That fall I made a commitment to give my spiritual journey one year. It was a year of soul searching and criticism of my own deep-seated belief system and theology—and I was convinced that at the end of it I would leave Christianity. I had always been attracted to Eastern Religions and believed that I could find answers there that had been hidden from me in the Christian church. But what I rediscovered was a tradition that had grounded me firmly in the teachings of Christ—and could sustain me through this processing of new theologies. Exactly one year later, during the fall of 2001, my decision was clear.

The Call to Ministry Never Fades

My Christian faith had anchored me for almost 40 years at that point in my spiritual journey. Even when I had drifted from the place that God called me to be—when I challenged that which God created me to be—it was the love of God revealed through the modern day disciples of the gospel of Jesus Christ that ushered me back into the presence of God. That is my tradition. That is my faith journey. I have learned that my belief in Christ is not so much grounded in historical facts or biblical texts, but has become a part of who I am through the shared experiences and relationships in Christ, modeled and enriched by my progressive Christian family. It has also set me free to believe that other cultures can have experiences of God through other teachers like Buddha, Mohammed, or in other sacred texts like the Bagavad Gita. It empowered me to embrace my sexuality as a gift from God—and not the abomination I was taught to

believe. It freed me from the bondage of exclusivity, fear and judgment—and has confirmed Christ's call for inclusion, love and acceptance. And once I really understood Christ's ministry, I again felt God's call on my life emerge in a new and wonderful way. It emerged not from an obligation to follow in the footsteps of my evangelist father, but from a desire to preach the good news of Jesus Christ—the good news that had been given to me—the good news that had set me free. I stood at the door of that new commitment, and boldly pushed it open. That door led me to seminary and eventual ordination in the UCC.

My seminary studies continued to stretch this commitment to theological exploration. After the invitation to attend seminary by a dear friend and United Methodist pastor, Rev. Timothy J. Forbess, who recognized and encouraged my call to ministry, I plunged into a critical study of theology, pastoral care and biblical studies from some amazing professors. Of significance was my participation in our contextual ministries core group, where the opportunity to self-disclose my identity as a gay man in this community of students from a variety of mainline denominations had substantial impact. The process of sharing our spiritual autobiographies was a major step toward the evolution of a healthy gay Christian identity. At the end of my last semester before graduation I was asked to speak at our senior Chapel where I identified myself as gay and called to ministry. The overwhelming response of support and admiration and the relationships that I had developed with students outside of the progressive context were transformative—for them and for me. This introduction to an ecumenical environment inspired a professional ministry grounded in interfaith and multi-denominational

collaboration. The impact of this communal experience and interpretation of the gospel at United Theological Seminary set this ministry in motion.

The first five years of ministry following seminary took several steps toward embracing more of God's amazing manifestations of faith and culture. My first call into ordained ministry focused on being a spiritual leader and mentor for a small struggling UCC congregation. When I was called as the new start pastor for Genntown UCC in 2005, I presented a very ambitious ministry plan. This plan was met with unanimous approval and enthusiasm. Throughout the realization of that plan there were significant changes including a new church name, renovated worship space and the ultimate decision to sell the existing property. The intent of moving into a more contemporary space would provide an enhanced environment for our alternative worship experience. While not everyone fully affirmed the direction of this new church start, many new folks came to Journey Church because of it.

Serving Coffee and Christ?

Journey Church launched several outreach and discipleship programs designed to minister to the emotional, physical and spiritual needs of children and youth in the community. Programs were identified to assist in community development and outreach for the church's mission objectives. Two programs launched in 2005 were Spirit Quest and Homework Club. These programs focused on personal empowerment, transformation and leadership development for children and youth in the community, using martial arts study as the transformative activity. Our vision for the future included additional outreach initiatives toward those goals. Plans for a youth and young adult Christian concert coffeehouse were begun a year later. A team of youth leaders from our outreach

programs were assembled to bring clarity to this vision. The creation of a new coffeehouse environment called “Common Grounds” was completed in 2007 enhancing the atmosphere of a new, extremely alternative worship center. A creative arts center began to emerge within the next year to provide after school programming to at-risk children and youth.

God called so many different sorts of folks into the ministry of Journey Church because God had plans for us—plans to give us hope and a future. We were called to serve coffee and Christ. During this crucial period I again became involved in acting through relationship with the Lebanon Community Theater. It was an escape for me from the grind of ministry, and connected me to the creative community. Yet after five years of blood (literally), sweat and tears—Journey Church and Common Grounds Coffeehouse closed due to insufficient funding. We questioned what went wrong. How could our investment into this community become so fragile? I soul-searched and I yelled at God. I asked for clarity, and we prayed through our grief. In the end, we had to acknowledge that the ministry outreach we accomplished was transformational, and our impact on the community was measurable. God still had a plan.

Looking for Solid Ground

After the closing of “Common Grounds” in Lebanon I was advised by my post-ordination ministry team to take some time to heal. I spend the next few months performing in a production of “West Side Story” at a local dinner theater. I was amazed by the energy that emerged from this endeavor; performing in ten shows a week. Even though the pay was minimal, I enjoyed the time away from full-time ministry. Yet even in the midst of my performances, I began to develop pastoral care relationships with other

actors in the show. These interactions nurtured my soul and confirmed my continued call to this creative community. After the show ended, the opportunity to reengage an innovative ministry model emerged with a focus on developing inclusive spiritual communities through an interfaith community center called “Common Ground” located inside the Dayton Mall. The mission of Common Ground was to improve people’s understanding, attitudes, and conduct regarding individual and community faith practices. The sharing of theological ideas and their practical application in a person of faith’s life was an important part of this new ministry—creating peace and ensuring religious freedom. I hoped to enable this environment of sharing by creating programs that met these goals, and it did help some people overcome physical, economic, social and religious barriers that they encountered on their spiritual journeys. Unfortunately, the inability to procure sustained funding forced the ministry to close at the end of 2009.

Yet in the midst of this turbulent time in ministry, an oasis of provocative spiritual thought and practice serendipitously emerged. I began studying Metaphysics shortly after the transition from traditional church to an alternative worship and ministry model. Metaphysics was a form of spiritual education and discipline that pushed every spiritual boundary I had built to “house” my Christian identity. This course of spiritual study was guided by committed teachers and mentors as I trod through unfamiliar territory. Amy Pawlus and Barbara Condrón were two major influences among the many teachers who reinterpreted the role of community in spiritual development. Without their support, patience, knowledge and determination I could not have stayed engaged in this unique journey.

Metaphysics teaches the path toward enlightenment through identifying and interpreting the physical world. Spiritual growth comes from learning the mechanisms by which the outer and inner minds are harmonized. My canon of sacred scripture expanded to embrace teachings by the inner mind, guided by Universal Laws. These Universal Laws served as a road map and guideposts on the journey toward enlightenment. While these Universal Laws pointed toward the wisdom that my inner subconscious mind could teach me, opening the portal to these teaching was contingent upon engaging spiritual disciplines like concentration, visualization, meditation and other mindful practices.

I met many others during this study with whom I had much affinity and close friendships. The further I progressed on the journey toward enlightenment the more fellow travelers I discovered. Sometimes these friendships almost became “cult-like” as I was encouraged to deepen my commitment to these studies by serving in greater capacities as student of metaphysics. But I had never experienced such deep commitment to one’s spiritual development before. It was intoxicating, and drew me in deeper and deeper with the promise of fully knowing my inner self. The gnostic in me was excited and motivated to grow in much deeper ways than I had known before. I resolved to become self-aware.

The Path of the Practitioner

The hiatus from pulpit ministry provided much time for reflection that I had avoided in my attempt to “prove” myself as a viable pastor in the UCC. The journey from seminary graduation directly into solo-ordained ministry was fast and furious. Since joining the staff of United Theological Seminary in 2010 I have delved deeply into new possibilities for progressive church renewal. In the fall of 2011, I self-published my first

book, “Committed to Love: Pastoral Care of Same-Sex Couples” based on my research in graduate school and experience in counseling lesbian and gay couples in my churches. I continued to seek opportunities for exploring and teaching the gospel of inclusion as a framework for renewing churches. So many obstacles have been in my way toward a sustaining relationship with God that I had longed for my entire life. However intense theological study and the commitments from supportive communities kept my mind and heart engaged in the journey toward authenticity.

It was this desire to be the authentic child of God that led me through some very dark places; places where I confronted my own addictions and sin—places where I met my accusers and abusers face to face. It was in the wilderness where I found God and the promise of new life in Christ that transformed my broken pieces into a life of wholeness and healing. I know I still have so much to learn—about God, about ministry, and about loving people. I am passionate about continuing my journey of reconstruction—and sharing that journey with others. I believe God’s call on my life has been renewed, yet focused into a ministry of reconciliation through biblical storytelling and spiritual formation. I desire to reconcile people back into relationship with God, teaching them biblical stories of justice, healing, liberation and transformation—whether they be gay or straight, outcast or insider, oppressed or oppressor. I cannot believe the Gospel of Jesus and do anything else.

Context Analysis

Rev. Dr. Mike Castle, the pastor of HCC—the context for this research, has consistently encouraged the congregation to enter a deeper theological engagement with

the quest for the historical Jesus and search for a systematic theology that enables both a critical view of biblical texts, yet embraces the vital role of scripture, reason, tradition, and experience. These values are the hallmarks of Progressive Christianity.

Definitions of Progressive Christianity

Progressive Christianity is characterized by a willingness to question tradition, acceptance of human diversity, a strong emphasis on social justice and care for the poor and the oppressed, and environmental stewardship of the Earth. Progressive Christians have a deep belief in the centrality of the instruction to "love one another" (John 15:17) within the teaching of Jesus Christ. This leads to a focus on promoting values such as compassion, justice, mercy, tolerance, often through political activism.⁵

Progressive Christianity draws on the insights of multiple theological streams including evangelicalism, liberalism, neo-orthodoxy, and liberation theology. Though the terms Progressive Christianity and Liberal Christianity are often used synonymously, the two movements are distinct, despite sharing many similarities. The characteristics of Progressive Christianity include:

- A spiritual vitality and expressiveness, including participatory, arts-infused, and lively worship as well as a variety of spiritual rituals and practices such as meditation
- Intellectual integrity including a willingness to question
- An affirmation of human diversity
- An affirmation of the Christian faith with a simultaneous sincere respect for other faiths⁶

⁵The Flip Side, "Soul Play: What Is Progressive Christianity Exactly?" accessed December 23, 2014, www.flipsidepress.org/content/soul-play-what-progressive-christianity-exactly.

⁶Hal Taussig, "Grassroots Progressive Christianity: A Quiet Revolution," *The Fourth R* 19, no. 3 (May–June 2006), accessed January 12, 2015, www.sdc.unitingchurch.org.au/WestarProgressiveArticle.pdf.

The “Eight Points of Progressive Christianity” affirms that, “by calling ourselves progressive Christians, we mean we are Christians who . . .”

1. Believe that following the path and teachings of Jesus can lead to an awareness and experience of the Sacred and the Oneness and Unity of all life;
2. Affirm that the teachings of Jesus provide but one of many ways to experience the Sacredness and Oneness of life, and that we can draw from diverse sources of wisdom in our spiritual journey;
3. Seek community that is inclusive of ALL people, including but not limited to:
 - Conventional Christians and questioning skeptics,
 - Believers and agnostics,
 - Women and men,
 - Those of all sexual orientations and gender identities,
 - Those of all classes and abilities;
4. Know that the way we behave towards one another is the fullest expression of what we believe;
5. Find grace in the search for understanding and believe there is more value in questioning than in absolutes;
6. Strive for peace and justice among all people;
7. Strive to protect and restore the integrity of our Earth;
8. Commit to a path of life-long learning, compassion, and selfless love.⁷

A process thought systematic theology initially helped to clarify the theological beliefs of progressive Christianity. The movement from a Platonic or classical theistic view of God to a relational understanding of God, as described in process theology, revealed a relatable God who is *for* us and not *against* us. Process theology proposed relationship with a God who is in the real world of our everydayness. Yet an application of process thought into the faith praxis of a progressive congregation has been elusive

⁷Progressive Christianity.org, “The 8 Points of Progressive Christianity” (2011 version), accessed January 12, 2015, <http://progressivechristianity.org/the-8-points>.

and difficult to interpret even for a thoughtful and educated congregation. This doctoral research questioned if the biblical storytelling paradigm could be a mechanism for exploring this relationship within that everydayness in meaningful yet practical ways.

Exploring the integration of process thought with biblical storytelling in this project was important for evaluating its effectiveness as a systematic theology for spiritual formation. Many of us in the congregation at HCC are pilgrims in exile who are moving through experiences of faith that have caused us to embody the doubter, the agnostic, or the spiritual exile. Could a biblical storytelling paradigm introduce a new way of seeing the Bible as a conversation partner grounded in the community's sacred trust? This project attempted to lead the congregation of HCC into an exploration of biblical storytelling with the hope of yielding opportunities for engaging the sacred biblical texts and reclaiming the Bible as a viable resource for spiritual formation.

Background

In 1996, Cross Creek Community Church (hereafter C4), the predecessor to HCC, was launched as a new church in the UCC by Pastor Mike and a group of 12 loyal "disciples" following his firing and removal of standing as an ordained minister within the Southern Baptist Convention. Pastor Mike was terminated because he refused to recant his identity as a gay man. Following a year of soul searching and exploration with several church partnerships, C4 officially opened its doors on March 23/24, 1997, after sending out a direct mail advertisement to approximately 60,000 residents. From its inception, the church has sought to be a welcoming place for all people, officially starting

as an Open and Affirming Congregation.⁸ The church has also been very open about its commitment to theological diversity and the freedom and openness of thought. Small group gatherings and studies, mostly in homes, have in some form or another been an integral part of the church's spiritual life since its founding.

During the first fifteen years, C4 evolved into a worshipping congregation of about 150 people per weekend, worshipping either at a 5:30 p.m. service on Saturday, or at the 9:30 a.m. or 11 a.m. service on Sunday morning. About 60% of the congregation's membership identified as gay or lesbian and about 40% heterosexual. The church was predominantly white, Caucasian, with a handful of African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, and Middle Eastern-Americans. The church was in an affluent, middle to upper middle class neighborhood. It was also highly educated with a large majority of its people having completed a bachelor's degree and a significant number of members having engaged or completed graduate level work. The members and other regular worship attendees are young, especially compared to other mainline churches. The majority of adults fall solidly within the 35-50 age group. Very few adults are younger than thirty-five or older than fifty years old.

C4 has been a suburban church from its beginning, meeting first in a small, contemporary rented space in a retail plaza on the border of Kettering, Ohio. A few years later, the congregation moved into its own building about 5 miles from its first location, taking up residence in the large, developed and developing suburb of Centerville in Washington Township. In its Centerville location it was the only UCC and

⁸Open and Affirming (ONA) is the UCC's designation for congregations, campus ministries, and other bodies in the UCC which make a public covenant of welcome into their full life and ministry to persons of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions. United Church of Christ, "Open and Affirming in the UCC," accessed December 30, 2012, <http://www.ucc.org/lgbt/ona.html>.

liberal/progressive church in the community. In the late fall of 2012 the congregation voted to merge with another congregation, Oak Creek UCC, which is located in Kettering, just a few blocks from C4's original location. The congregation is, in a sense, returning to its birthplace neighborhood, occupying a large sprawling facility complete with a full-time day care center, multiplying its square footage from 5,000 to 33,000. Even though the merger is still young, this new relationship with the smaller, older and more conservative congregation of Oak Creek UCC has provided new opportunities and challenges to its evolving ministry. The first step toward that end was renaming the two merged churches and consolidating staff, ministry resources and financial accounting.

The newly merged congregation of HCC is a patchwork blend of various Christian traditions. There is no majority Christian tradition or background. The church is a mix of people coming from conservative/evangelical, mainline, and Roman Catholic traditions. Many people who come to the church do so because of their experience with homosexuality, not because of theology. These are people who either identify themselves as gay or lesbian or as friends and family of gay and lesbian persons who are strongly opposed to any church discrimination based on sexual orientation. Others come to the church because it is not perceived to be dogmatic or fundamentalist.

HCC's values and vision are also very progressive. Since its inception in 1997, the vision has been: to embody the ministry, message, and hope of Jesus Christ. Its mission is to empower people to become fully devoted followers of the God of Jesus Christ. The constitution of HCC emphasizes the distinctive value of radical inclusivity and responsible freedom through the union of the Spirit—resulting in complete and abiding liberty. This liberty is extended to the individual and the Church for exercising

excellence in biblical interpretation, religious practice, intentional discipleship, redemptive ministry, celebrative worship, and authentic community. Pastor Mike and the congregation of HCC fully embrace this progressive approach to the Christian life and ministry, embedding this journey of exploration into every aspect of the church during its formative years. A deep commitment to this journey resulted in a purposeful plan for its future growth and evolution: “to emulate the ministry, message, and hope of Jesus Christ through membership development, worship, spiritual formation, and justice and witness ministries.”⁹

The Theological Grounding for Deconstruction

Pastor Mike has written and spoken extensively about the practical application of C4’s progressive theological perspectives. He asserts that we are a contemporary people feeling at home in a thoroughly modern world, embracing the findings and insights of science and psychology as normative. However, unlike most mainline and evangelical Christians who fully function in this modern world but hold onto pre-modern ideas in regard to Christian theology, HCC includes a growing number of vocal protestors who are dissatisfied with this predicament and seek a new paradigm. Pastor Mike believes his calling, as a seminary trained clergy person, is to introduce Christian scholarship that brings the modern worldview to bear on Christian faith. As Pastor Mike suggests:

Somehow, lay people in churches are largely unfamiliar with this body of wisdom and insight. Seminary trained clergy, for weal and for woe, have been exposed to this material in their professional training and formation. But strangely, the

⁹Cross Creek Community Church, “Mission and Vision” (2012), accessed November 3, 2012, www.crosscreekchurch.org/about-us.

theological education offered at the seminaries and divinity schools never seems to find its way to the local church.¹⁰

Pastor Mike cites Michael Coogan's article, "The Great Gulf Between Scholars and the Pew" in *Bible Review* that says, "Post-modern scholarship further indicts seminary academics who have failed to make biblical and theological scholarship accessible to the Church, settling instead for the 'esoteric over the elegant' and 'leaving the field to the pious and ignorant.'"¹¹ However, he Pastor Mike suggests that "blame the seminaries" is always an easy answer and ready scapegoat. However, as pastor of a local church, and one who serves with other pastoral colleagues across denominational lines, he thinks that judgment is misplaced.

The responsibility for the lack of theological education must fall largely to seminary-trained pastors. For many years, a conspiracy of silence by professional ministers has preserved the gap between modern biblical and theological scholarship and the practice and meaning of Christian faith in the pew. Possibly, through fear of loss of control or authority, or from lack of clarity or uncertainty, professional ministers simply have not engaged theological education in the churches.¹²

Pastor Mike's dissertation was a ground-breaking approach to narrowing the distance between lay persons and progressive theological education. Through Pastor Mike and other lay leadership, the original congregation of C4 was invited into a serious commitment to the deconstruction of conservative fundamentalist ideals and exploration of a more progressive theological paradigm. A significant amount of C4's resources for theological teaching and exploration were also committed toward this endeavor. As a result of Pastor Mike's doctoral work, C4's leadership was motivated to review its

¹⁰Castle, *New Dimensions*, 12.

¹¹Castle, *New Dimensions*, 12.

¹²Castle, *New Dimensions*, 13.

programs and plans for children and adult theological education. The church leadership increased C4's offering of small groups and conducted special weekends with guest theologians and biblical scholars. Even though these ideas and materials presented were often challenging and disorienting to the conventional, pre-modern ideas of the church, they believed that: "there is no broader, strategic plan to lead the people of our church through the purging fires of deconstruction to see if a rebuilding of a creatively critical Christian faith is possible or desirable."¹³

C4's experience with Pastor Mike's project empowered its leadership to strategize and lobby for an education process that: leads people to engage the historical Jesus seriously and intentionally as an entry point for Christian theological reflection, introduces critical deconstruction of pre-modern Christian understandings, and encourages people to remain fully critical in their quest for Christian meaning and their discernment of the Gospel.¹⁴ New spiritual formation strategies were grounded in an intentional struggle with the question of the historical Jesus and the current Jesus scholarship surrounding that question with lay people in the local church. It was an effort to see how this body of scholarship and its theological implications play out in the place where people practice their faith and seek spiritual formation in their own quest for God. C4 discovered that even deeper than the historical Jesus scholarship, the very nature and authority of the Bible was examined. A majority of participants in these explorations who originally believed that the Bible was a God product made a decisive and significant shift

¹³Castle, *New Dimensions*, 122.

¹⁴Castle, *New Dimensions*, 122.

to seeing the Bible as a human construction.¹⁵ Pastor Mike concluded that the historical Jesus scholarship was not beyond the grasp of lay people. He found that they wanted this information. More importantly, they *needed* this information if they were going to shape for themselves, and with their local community of faith, a contemporary Christian spirituality. In the end these processes shattered the myth of a biblical authority (or factuality) grounded in God for many in his study.¹⁶

In summary, C4 was launched as a progressive community of faith. Many congregants, including me, self-identified as recovering biblical literalists who were attracted to a more intellectually defensible approach to the Bible. That is the basic theological problem that C4 was created to address, and it has had much success in doing so. The driving theological quest undergirding the search for the historical Jesus at C4 has been the criticism of the literalist interpretation of the Bible's various statements about homosexuality. Yet this literalist criticism of homosexuality was the first of many interpretive issues that C4's quest exposed as prohibitive for an integrated faith within the fully scientific and intellectual culture.

Synergy Between the Researcher and Context

This experience of this quest at C4 was life changing. While not a formal part of Pastor Mike's research, I journeyed alongside congregational participants of the study through this process of plunging into the world of historical/biblical criticism. During this process several of the participants in the research, as well as many other members of the

¹⁵Castle, *New Dimensions*, 122.

¹⁶Castle, *New Dimensions*, 54.

congregation who engaged the quest for the historical Jesus, experienced notable angst and sometimes even distain for the deconstruction process. Yet many would not rest in this desolate land, and were motivated by Pastor Mike to search deeper for a life giving faith not bound by historical fact or biblical myth. This challenge ultimately led me to seminary and ordained ministry.

However, some of these congregants left C4 for new church homes with more familiar theologies. The deconstruction process for these congregants, while hopeful in its intention for engaging intellectualism as a means to deeper faith formation, also resulted in diluting passion for the Bible as an authoritative sacred text. This researcher's doctoral project suggests that this lack of passion is a result of not moving beyond the ongoing quest for the historical Jesus, leaving many with unmet spiritual needs. It has resulted in an emotionally detached objectivism that has separated faith from human experience and bankrupted life-giving interaction with the biblical text, inhibiting its potential for a progressive and transformative interpretation.

Moving Beyond Deconstruction

The journey into historical criticism has been a necessary intellectual pursuit for members of C4 who have sought to move beyond the trappings of religious literalism toward an authentic, life-affirming relationship with God. However, deciding to remain in this place of deconstruction does little to motivate re-engagement with the sacred texts or inspire passion for the narratives of Jesus and ancient faith communities. My doctoral project assumed that these same congregants would be willing to engage biblical storytelling as a new way of "hearing" that welcomed the Bible as a conversation partner grounded in the community's sacred trust.

This chapter has defined the area of ministry in which the research was accomplished beginning with my spiritual autobiography. A definition of progressive Christianity was proposed for defining the community's progressive identity, followed by an analysis of the project's context, including historical and background information. Previous theological research accomplished by the context's ministerial leadership was summarized in order to fully define the problem being addressed by this research. The chapter also assessed the absence of biblical authority in the progressive context and concluded with a summary of the synergy between my spiritual journey and my context.

The next four chapters present the historical, biblical, theological and theoretical foundations for engaging a biblical storytelling paradigm for progressive Christians. Chapter two summarizes the history of biblical interpretation from the Enlightenment culture to literate culture as "meaning as reference." Chapter three presents performance criticism as a new exegetical paradigm for discerning the meaning of the biblical story in its original historical context. Chapter four identifies process theology as a dimension of this hermeneutic, and proposes the application of its theological processes as a way of connecting the original experience of the story to the contemporary experience of the audience. Chapter five outlines storytelling as a theoretical foundation for translating "meaning as experience" into pedagogical strategies for reconnection and spiritual formation. Fourteen healing powers of story provide the theoretical framework for constructing activities of meaning-making for project participants, and understanding their responses to this experience is presented in chapter seven.

CHAPTER TWO

THE HISTORY OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

The Eclipse of the Biblical Narrative

Dr. Thomas Boomershine asserts that the primary function of Scripture is making connections between stories about God in their original historical context and the contemporary experience of culture.¹ That is something we do as theologians all the time. Yet how are those connections made? What are the means of making these ancient stories connect with our contemporary experience? How do these mechanisms enable the basic symbols of our faith to emit new meaning in new contexts?

In oral culture, both in pre-literate communities and now in the post-modern digital world, the way of making connections between the experiences and revelation of God in the biblical stories was through the telling of parallel or connected stories. It is the medium of communication that shapes and determines the meaning of that same communication.² The sacred stories were connected by telling personal stories, and then retelling those stories in later contexts. Connections are then rendered through telling of the original story. When people heard the stories they made connections between their

¹Thomas E. Boomershine, "From Oral to Literate to Digital Culture," *Lecture Notes*, (Dayton, OH: United Theological Seminary, February, 2014).

²Thomas E. Boomershine, "Biblical Storytelling and Biblical Scholarship," *Network of Biblical Storytellers Seminar*, (2010).

own experience and the stories. This was the primary hermeneutic of the biblical storyteller—to enable people to make those connections.³

Yet between pre-literate and digital culture a literate culture developed—first with manuscripts and then printing. This rise in literacy changed the definition of reality. In Plato's “theory of the forms” reality was seen, not as experience, but as the ideas that are reflected in sense experience. For literate cultures, biblical connections were made via theology, which was the extension of the analysis of these ideas in philosophy. The ideas and philosophies generated from this analysis replaced the original oral experience (and medium) of the biblical narrative. Theology emerged as the application of the hermeneutics of philosophy to the stories and experience of God in the biblical tradition. Theology within manuscript culture was then homogenized through a fourfold exegesis in which levels of meaning were identified as literal, allegorical, symbolic and cosmic. Each level of meaning progressed into a higher level of abstraction. These higher levels of abstraction gave rise to mysticism, various forms of contemplation, and an increasing distance from the original meaning of the narratives.⁴

As manuscript culture evolved into print culture, this same basic system of meaning-making continued while clarifying the disparate ideas in theology, creating a further chasm between the literal, allegorical, symbolic and cosmic meanings. Theology was based on evidence in the text. The invention of the printing press and resulting rise of literacy in Europe made possible the development of theology on the basis of the actual words of the Greek and Hebrew text. The Bible's inspiration came to mean the

³Boomershine, *Lecture Notes*.

⁴Boomershine, *Lecture Notes*.

inspiration of the individual written words and therefore the identity of the text as the Word of God.⁵ That was the source of the Protestant Reformation, which had its roots in the Renaissance movement and Greek and Roman models of philosophy that re-appropriated them for 15th and 16th century culture. These developments were happening in every field because of the new resources that print made available.

This re-appropriation of philosophy had a huge impact on Christianity as the leader of the intellectual interpretive revolution. It was now possible to reevaluate the various ideas that had been developed from the study of the manuscripts, many of which were not accessible to the public.⁶ Martin Luther emphasized the literal meaning of the Greek and Hebrew texts and advocated its translation into the vernacular languages. While championing its literal meaning, he reduced the fourfold hermeneutical model into a figural meaning, while valuing the plain meaning in his exegetical interpretation. Luther's writings were primarily theological in nature. As the stories were told, there was a realistic meaning that was assumed to be present. What the stories say describe what happened. If there's a theological problem with them, then it gets interpreted with a figural meaning. The result was a spiritual transformation for millions of people reading the texts in their own vernacular translation.⁷

Reading the biblical narratives in silence became the dominant way of biblical study for the academics and intellectuals of the 17th-18th century. Everything was held in the imagination of the reader, who was reading a document in silence and reimagining

⁵Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974), 37.

⁶Boomershine, *Lecture Notes*.

⁷Boomershine, *Lecture Notes*.

the story from a highly personal relationship with the author—like a series of letters written by the author to the reader. That had never happened before and so a revolution followed, initially of the upper-class, but later of a wider group of people who were literate and learned to read in silence.⁸ The Bible came to be studied as a document, first among the intelligentsia and then gradually among the people. The development of a hermeneutical system for making sense of the Bible as a document was the primary project of biblical scholarship in the Enlightenment.

The transformation of biblical literature into documents read in silence was correlated with the development of science and an empirical philosophy. Empiricism called for looking only at the evidence. It is what you see that determines reality. Controversies generated by scientists such as Copernicus illustrated the dilemma of conflicting paradigms. Copernicus' theory, that all the planets rotate around the sun, was labeled as heresy by the Catholic church because the ideas that are implicit in the Genesis story and throughout the Bible imply that the Earth is at the center of the cosmos and that the sun and all things revolve around the earth. The ideas that are present in the Bible were what determined reality. In opposition to the church, Copernicus called attention to the empirical data as reality and was declared a heretic and almost killed. However, scientific empiricists eventually persuaded the perception of the Bible as mythology and called for disassociation from it and religion altogether. The scientific community disregarded the Bible since it was not grounded in empiricism.⁹

⁸Boomershine, *Lecture Notes*.

⁹Frei, *Eclipse*, 139.

The prevailing question that emerged in the 18th century was whether any interpretation of the Bible held meaning. In turn, was there any meaning to the biblical tradition? German scholars took on this challenge. They developed a scientific way of studying the Bible so that its identity as a source of knowledge could be reestablished. This scientific study of the Bible was grounded in a new foundation called “meaning as reference”—a study of the Bible as a source of referential information about history and theology. Instead of hearing, reading or interpreting the stories, meaning came from a scientific study of the original Hebrew and Greek documents, resulting in a conceptual, methodological and pedagogical revolution. This movement introduced the study of the Bible by documentary analysis versus learning and telling stories, identifying the sources based on objective scientific analysis of the manuscript. One such scientific “discovery” that influenced hermeneutics was the identification of “JEDP,” the Yahwist, Elohist, Deuteronomist, and Priestly writers who composed the documents of the Pentateuch. Although it was called the documentary hypothesis, it was not a theory or premise, but functioned as the truth. Post-modern theologians are products of that hypothesis.¹⁰

This new framework of the worship and the knowledge of God was not related to religion, but to science, humanism and the secular world. The political crises happening in Europe, specifically in Germany with the subjugation of Christianity by the Nazis and the politicizing of faith by capitalists or militarists in the United States, prompted these responses. It was a reaction to Pietism and an emphasis on the emotional experience of the biblical narratives.¹¹ So the clergy became the most well educated, the most scientific,

¹⁰Boomershine, *Lecture Notes*.

¹¹Frei, *Eclipse*, 38.

and able to defend the Bible from scientific empiricists. Theology became the study of the experiences of God using the biblical texts as a reference document, by analyzing the sources that underlie the documents. It was a way of disassociating the Bible from feeling, from the naïveté of a realistic reading and literal interpretation.¹²

Hans Frei's term for this empirical interpretation of the Bible was "meaning as ostensive reference."¹³ What can be determined on the basis of empirical evidence is what actually happened in the events described in the Bible. Boomershine suggests that the development of this "meaning as ostensive reference" hermeneutic created "a great playing field in which everybody shared the basic assumption of meaning. It was accepted as the truth. Science won, and we now live in a world in which reality is determined by what you can demonstrate on the basis of empirical data."¹⁴ Humans gave sole authority to what could be proved, and the Bible was proven to be false. The recognition that the Bible was fundamentally wrong about the structure of the cosmos was a significant paradigm shift.

As a result of this "meaning as ostensive reference" construct, two ways of interpreting the Bible emerged—conservative and liberal. Frei called the conservatives *Supernaturalists*.¹⁵ The conservatives said that everything in the Bible is a literal factual description of what actually took place. The meaning of the document is strictly correlated with its historical facticity. This appealed to a mindset that was reflected in

¹²Boomershine, *Lecture Notes*.

¹³Frei, *Eclipse*, 87.

¹⁴Boomershine, *Lecture Notes*.

¹⁵Frei, *Eclipse*, 86.

literate culture. The Bible comes from having meaning as a reference document.¹⁶ The other side of the spectrum was a more ambiguous crusade associated with liberalism. This crusade, grounded in a “source or historical criticism” hermeneutic, led to the quest for the historical Jesus. The Jesus Seminar movement popularized the basic Enlightenment mindset that was set in motion in the 17th and 18th century. This liberal perspective proposed that there may be some things in the biblical record that could be factual, yet most of the stories were mythological. Jesus may have lived but he was not necessarily resurrected. Fact versus fiction was determined by a criticism of the source documents from which the biblical narratives were constructed. This liberal “meaning as ostensive reference” hermeneutic was a mix of history and legend.

The other philosophical system that developed in the 18th century was idealism. In this system, reality was based on ideas. Interpretation of the biblical stories within this system was called “meaning as ideal reference.” Emerging from the work of Christian Wolff, the meaning of the story was the ideas that you can identify in the story. Frei defined the philosophy of Wolff’s theory as conceptual: “All our words are connected with concepts, so that words, properly used, always signify. A concept in turn is a representation of a subject matter in our thoughts.”¹⁷ This construct was based on a critical analysis of the sources, which can then be defined as the source of these ideas. Conservatives argued that the Bible is a systematic non-contradictory set of ideas. It is an infallible source of consistent truth in which there is no contradiction. For Catholics the Pope is an infallible source of doctrinal knowledge about God. For conservative

¹⁶Boomershine, *NBS Seminar*, 9.

¹⁷Frei, *Eclipse*, 97.

Protestants it's not the Pope, it is the Bible. The Bible is an infallible source of doctrinal truth that is consistent based on its theological examination.¹⁸

The liberal understanding of the Bible as a source of “meaning as ideal reference” suggested that there are a variety of theologies in the Bible. These biblical theologies are also a result of a comprehensive evaluation of the biblical documents. There are ideas that are implicit in the various books of the New Testament. Some of the more conservative liberals would say that there is a way in which you can construe all of the theologies that are implicit in the New Testament as a consistent system. Most liberals conclude that there are varieties of theologies, some of which are contradictory to one another.¹⁹

Whether the Bible was conservatively or liberally interpreted from a “meaning as ideal reference” or “meaning as ostensive reference” perspective, this “meaning as reference” construct was based on the reading of the biblical narratives in silence as documents.²⁰ Frei summarized that this long tradition of reading the Bible in silence had taken for granted that there was something historical in its narratives, no matter from what religious or irreligious point of view: “Everything conspired to confine explicative hermeneutics with knowledge of potential or actual reality. General hermeneutics and biblical-historical criticism grew up together.”²¹ As these two forms of critical hermeneutics gained supremacy in theological education and biblical authority, its impact on the local church and congregational piety began to change the religious landscape.

¹⁸Boomershine, *Lecture Notes*.

¹⁹Boomershine, *Lecture Notes*.

²⁰Boomershine, *NBS Seminar*, 9.

²¹Frei, *Eclipse*, 103.

The Bankruptcy of the Biblical Critical Paradigm

Walter Wink's writings have helped to clarify the issues that arise within progressive Christian communities influenced by the historical/biblical criticism paradigm. He considered that taking up permanent residence with a biblical criticism response is a bankrupt endeavor: "solely because it is incapable of achieving what most of its practitioners considered its purpose to be: to interpret the Scriptures so that the past becomes alive and illumines our present with new possibilities for personal and social transformation."²² Wink believed that the historical criticism method had a vested interest in undermining the Bible's authority. He asserted that the fiction of "detachment" made vital relatedness to the content of the text impossible.²³

Secondly, Wink believed that the ideology of objectivism drew historical criticism into a false consciousness. He understood that this ideology demanded a detached observation of phenomena without any influence of emotions, will, interests, or bias. He was concerned that the error of objectivism as an ideology lies, as he states: "in its intellectualism, its blindness to the irrational or unconscious, and its separation of theory from practices."²⁴ Such an ideology separates intellect from emotion, and does not allow the integration of emotions into critical thinking. Wink alleged that historical criticism carried over these methods from the natural sciences. This kind of scientific criticism only asked questions of the biblical texts that could be answered by the method,

²²Walter Wink, *The Bible in Human Transformation: Toward a New Paradigm for Biblical Study* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1996), 11.

²³Wink, *Human Transformation*, 12-13.

²⁴Wink, *Human Transformation*, 13.

and resisted the kinds of inquiry that lead to personal and social development.²⁵ In the end this method refused to examine the intention of the text and the human interest for reading it.

As historical biblical research was held in an antithetical position to orthodoxy, it became the defensive power of the liberal church. The community of reference and accountability transitioned from the community of believers to biblical scholars.²⁶ Removing scholarship from the community deprived them of critical and constructive contributions. As the laity were removed from interpreting the biblical texts, theological inquiry no longer required human interaction or experience. The faith community was no longer integral to the discovery of biblical truths. Crises that emerged in biblical studies matched the crises in communities of faith. Liberal Protestantism morphed into the search for contexts in which academic interpretations of the Bible might have significance.²⁷

Finally, Wink believed that biblical criticism developed in a historical context that has since changed significantly. Its birth was in reaction to Protestant dependency on the Bible as the sole source of authority. It sought to destroy a conservative biblical reality with a liberal one conceived to be better. Now that the struggle is over, and biblical critical scholarship is the status quo, it has ceased to be utopian and no longer moves toward a greater comprehension of truth.²⁸ He believed biblical criticism was as much evangelistic as fundamentalism, but it sought a different type of conversion. Until his death Wink characterized the 20th century biblical/historical criticism movement as

²⁵Wink, *Human Transformation*, 15-16.

²⁶Wink, *Human Transformation*, 17.

²⁷Wink, *Human Transformation*.

²⁸Wink, *Human Transformation*, 18.

bankrupt as 19th century revivalism. It is an inadequate method dependent on a false objectivism that has excluded the faith community. It has outlived its usefulness.²⁹

Toward a New Paradigm of Biblical Study

There has been much disagreement over the bankruptcy of the historical critical method. It has been a challenge for Liberal Protestantism to recognize the negative impact of biblical/historical criticism on the post-modern church. Within the UCC and progressive churches like HCC, the American concept of freedom has become the highest ideology, allowing more control over their lives. Combined with the other two legs of modernity, science and secularity, this three legged structure stands at the heart of the challenge to post-modern religious faith, which Ted Peters calls “critical consciousness.”³⁰ The resulting distance from this critical consciousness is known to theologians as the “hermeneutical gap.” The mind doubts what is real and searches for answers to questions that only it can answer. Dubbed the “hermeneutic of suspicion” by philosophers, the post-modern religious mind develops a false consciousness by projecting its own mundane self-interest on God and heaven.³¹ The modern mind’s communication about God and heaven becomes a disguised form of talking about the earth, which in turn distances itself from the source of religious life found in the ancient Christian symbols.

²⁹Wink, *Human Transformation*, 20.

³⁰Peters, *God*, 11.

³¹Peters, *God*, 14.

Because this hermeneutical approach presupposes that the context has changed, and theology primarily translates from one context to the next, then theologians will need to reinterpret the original meaning of what the Bible says in light of the new situation.³² C4's quest for the historical Jesus, and eventual integration of biblical/historical criticism into its spiritual formation practices, was an important step toward deconstructing oppressive biblical texts in order to reinterpret their meaning for the progressive community. Yet Peters suggests what is needed next is a "theological method that assumes that both ancient and modern understandings belong to a single and more inclusive tradition history—to a single story—and that this tradition-history will eventually participate in the one comprehensive story of humankind on earth."³³ Therefore, the basic symbols that are tied to the original experience of the revelation from God are irreplaceable and untranslatable, and have the protean power to emit new meaning in new contexts.³⁴ Chapter three presents performance criticism as a new exegetical paradigm for discerning the meaning of the biblical story in its original historical context.

³²Peters, *God*, 15.

³³Peters, *God*, 16.

³⁴Peters, *God*.

CHAPTER THREE

PERFORMANCE CRITICISM AS EXEGETICAL PARADIGM

The journey from seeing the Bible (and its interpreters) as agents of abuse and oppression to that of a sacrament and conversational partner grounded in a communal sacred trust is, in this researcher's opinion, the significant impact of the mission and ministry of Jesus. The gospels are inherently a criticism of the dominant religious paradigm illuminated by the exploits of a "Mediterranean Jewish peasant" engaged in the "covert and the overt arts of resistance."¹ Jesus was not the first to join this resistance and certainly not the last. But this "Jesus Movement" began within the context of his own Jewish heritage and expanded into gentile territory that ultimately impacted the wider religious communities of antiquity. A search for a biblical story that might encapsulate this movement landed in the story of the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:10-28.) Before exploring the implications of this story for Jesus' ministry and its impact on the original audiences hearing it, a clarification of the methodology of performance criticism as a new hermeneutic grounded in "meaning as experience" is crucial.

¹John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography: A Startling Account of What We Can Know About the Life of Jesus* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishing, 1994), 103 and 105.

The Medium of the Message

Storytelling is a relatively new method for interpreting biblical narratives. Boomershine asserts that biblical storytelling is a historical study of these biblical narratives as told by storytellers to the original audiences in the ancient world. Twentieth century studies in communication have determined that the medium of any communication shapes and determines its meaning.² “The medium is the message” is a phrase coined by Marshall McLuhan, meaning that the form of a medium embeds itself in the message, creating a symbiotic relationship by which the medium influences how the message is perceived. This means that since people focus on what is recognizable in the content of the message, they miss changes in the relationship with the message. As technology changes societal values and norms of behavior, the social implications of the dominant medium begin to surface. These changes may occur because of cultural and religious issues or historical precedents.³

The medium of the biblical narratives has transitioned from oral culture, to manuscript, print, document, and now digital culture. Each of these communication systems has a distinctive type of meaning which has influenced the cognitive perception and reception of the biblical narratives. Boomershine believes that since the Gospels were produced in a communication culture that was transitioning between an ancient oral medium and early literate technology, the goal of biblical storytelling as a foundational methodology is to identify the meaning of biblical narratives in their original historical

²Boomershine, *NBS Seminar*, 1.

³Mark Federman, “What is the Meaning of the ‘Medium is the Message?’” *McLuhan Program in Culture and Technology*, accessed January 6, 2015, http://individual.utoronto.ca/markfederman/article_mediumisthemessage.html.

context by studying them in their original medium. “If the medium determines the meaning, the story must be experienced in its original medium in order to experience its meaning. Changing the medium will change the meaning.”⁴ Boomershine goes further by suggesting that:

In the case of biblical narratives, if the original medium was oral storytelling or recitation to audiences from memory sometimes with but often without a document, we must tell and listen to the stories told from memory to audiences in order to experience the original meaning. . . The theory then is that the customary scholarly practice of the silent reading of ancient narratives as a foundational methodology has caused misperception and misinterpretation. This practice could be called media anachronism. It is to read back into the ancient world the documentary communication system of the 18th–20th centuries.⁵

According to Boomershine, the implication of media anachronism confronts the theory that the receivers of biblical stories were silent readers. Rather, biblical stories were heard after being composed as sounds and delivered to the audience through the performance of storytellers. The historical probability of public performances as this primary mode of audience reception is strengthened by the evidence that a very small percentage of persons in the ancient world knew how to read. This predominately illiterate audience would listen to the stories as they were performed, often in small groups. The idea of a “reader” developed later in literate culture.⁶

Performance Criticism as Hermeneutic

David Rhodes sees this as a paradigm shift for biblical studies. Performance criticism is the term for a new hermeneutic that shifts the way biblical scholars view early

⁴Boomershine, *NBS Seminar*, 2.

⁵Boomershine, *NBS Seminar*, 2.

⁶Boomershine, *NBS Seminar*, 4.

Christianity and the methods used to study biblical texts. This shift reinterprets the medium of the biblical narratives from writings to oral compositions. Rhodes proposes a model that includes the communication dynamics of speech, memory, and writing. While historical and source criticism view the biblical texts from the perspective that they were written by an author and read by readers, performance criticism experiences the stories by imagining how they reflect an oral performance done by memory for an early predominately illiterate Christian community. This new perspective re-views biblical narratives as examples of performance literature.⁷

Performance criticism reframes biblical narratives in the original context of the oral cultures of Judaism and early Christianity. This hermeneutical process considers: the performance event, the performer, the receptive audience, the cultural context, and the manuscript of the text. The methodology embraces many approaches, including: Historical Criticism, Narrative Criticism, Form and Genre Criticism, Reader-Response Criticism, Rhetorical Criticism, Textual Criticism, Orality Criticism, Speech Act Theory, Social-Science Criticism, Linguistic Criticism, The Art of Translation, Ideological Criticism, Theater Studies, and Oral Interpretation Studies. These processes construct scenarios of ancient performances, and then translate and perform these scenarios to a contemporary audience for group discussion.⁸

Boomershine has identified the unique aspects of a performance critical view of the biblical narratives that, when utilized, can reconstruct these scenarios. Most

⁷David Rhoads and Joanna Dewey, "Performance Criticism: A Paradigm Shift in New Testament Studies," *From Text to Performance: Narrative and Performance Criticisms in Dialogue and Debate* (Cambridge, UK: Lutterworth Press, 2015), 1-2.

⁸David Rhoads, "What is Performance Criticism?" (Chicago, IL: Lutheran School of Theology), accessed January 6, 2015, www.biblicalperformancecriticism.org.

importantly is the confirmation of sound as the predominant media world of the biblical story. He believes that: "the composition of the narratives consisted of the stories being composed as sound and then recorded in the only technology for recording sounds in the ancient world, namely, writing...The stories were not composed by the eye but by the ear. They were composed to be heard, rather than to be seen."⁹ Additionally, mnemonic devices like the repetition of words, verbal threads, and portrayal of the audience as a character in the story become clear when the biblical narratives are told and heard as stories. The function of this characterization creates dynamics of aesthetic distance between the characters and the hearers of stories, which in turn shapes the audience's relationship with the characters.

Boomershine further contends: "this style of characterization is the presentation of real, often flawed human beings with whom the audience is invited to identify. The stories are not theological allegories but stories about real people who come to life in the telling of the story."¹⁰ The impact of the story for those who identify with these characters is a reversal of expectations—from sympathetically identifying with the characters to being psychologically implicated by their wrong actions. Boomershine believes that the stories have meaning as "relationship" rather than as "reference": "when you listen to and tell the stories, you simply do not come away from the experience with *just* theological concepts and arguments in mind—the meaning has more to do with relationships: relationship with Jesus, with the disciples, with a person Jesus heals, the

⁹Boomershine, *NBS Seminar*, 3.

¹⁰Boomershine, *NBS Seminar*, 6.

crowd, with Jesus's opponents, and with God.”¹¹ The meaning is dynamic, rather than static and there are more points of intersection with storytelling and meaning-making through first-hand experience of the stories.

This project sought to create an environment where these first-hand encounters could be experienced. During each week of the project, a biblical story was investigated from a performance criticism paradigm for illuminating these points of intersection and providing the means for “meaning-making as experience.” The main strategy was making the stories come alive through storytelling. The story of Jesus and the Canaanite woman was one such experience. What follows is a view of that story from a performance criticism perspective.

A Performance Criticism Exegesis

A Sound Map of Jesus and the Canaanite Woman

Then he called the crowd to him and said to them,
 “Listen and understand:
 it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person,
 but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles.”

Then the disciples approached and said to him,
 “Do you know that the Pharisees took offense
 when they heard what you said?”
 He answered, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted
 will be uprooted.

Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind.
 And if one blind person guides another,
 both will fall into a pit.”

But Peter said to him, “Explain this parable to us.”
 Then he said, “Are you also still without understanding?”

¹¹Boomershine, *NBS Seminar*, 8.

Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach,
and goes out into the sewer?

But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart,
and this is what defiles.

For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery,
fornication, theft, false witness, slander.

These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile.”

Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon.

Just then, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting,

“Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David;
my daughter is tormented by a demon.”

But he did not answer her at all.

And his disciples came and urged him, saying, “Send her away, for she keeps
shouting after us.”

He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.”

He answered, “It is not fair to take the children’s food
and throw it to the dogs.”

She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs
that fall from their masters’ table.”

Then Jesus answered her, “Woman, great is your faith!

Let it be done for you as you wish.”

And her daughter was healed instantly.

Story

Sounds

An initial hearing of this passage might give the impression that the author of Matthew is racist or that Matthew’s community is anti-Gentile.¹² Yet this is a narrative with an audience and characters, presented by a storyteller that makes connections between them. Several verbal threads in Jesus’s sayings seem to insult the Canaanite

¹²Kukzin Lee and Francois P. Viljoen, “The Healing of a Canaanite Woman’s Daughter (Matthew 15:21-28),” *Acta Patristica Et Byzantina* 20 (2009): 77.

woman, raising the dialogue to state of elevated tension. His responses become severe and more manifest. At first he does not answer, then declares that his ministry is limited only to the Israelites. Then he despises the woman by comparing her to a dog.¹³ By responding first in silence, then rejection, and finally calling her a “little bitch,” Jesus’ use of severe communication draws attention to speech that is typically meant for Gentiles like the Canaanite woman, since Gentiles were generally regarded as dogs by Judeans. In some biblical and rabbinic literature, the term “dog” was also used as a metaphor to refer to the abuse of persons of the lower classes, according to Israelite social standards. In Israelite tradition, the dog does not only refer to Gentiles but also to the maimed, crippled, lame and undeserving sheep of the house of Israel.¹⁴

The Matthean storyteller intentionally changes the description of the woman from Syro-Phoenician, as recorded in Mark’s version, to “Canaanite.” Perhaps the change in sound intensity does more than just designate the woman as Gentile, but as a traditional enemy of Israel. It also draw attention to the woman’s ‘otherness’ and to the centrality of the story to the message of this gospel.¹⁵ These differences have been interpreted differently, either revealing the author’s negative attitude about the Canaanites, or to simply suggest that Jesus entered a Gentile area.¹⁶ However, during the first century the

¹³Lee and Viljoen, *Healing*, 80.

¹⁴Lazare S. Rukundwa and Andries G. van Aarde, “Revisiting Justice in the First Four Beatitudes in Matthew (5:3-6) and the Story of the Canaanite Woman (Mt. 15:21-28): A Postcolonial Reading,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 61, no. 3 (2005): 945.

¹⁵Melanie S. Baffes, “Jesus and the Canaanite Woman: A Story of Reversal,” *Journal of Theta Alpha Kappa* 35, no. 2 (2011): 16.

¹⁶Lee and Viljoen, *Healing*, 79.

Canaanite community as a people or tribe no longer existed but the term was still used to denote a disgraceful people.¹⁷

Yet the Canaanite woman responds to Jesus in a very different manner. Her use of the designation “Lord, son of David,” a highly Jewish term usually used in healing stories, may anticipate the limitation of Jesus’ ministry.¹⁸ It also carried a political connotation, invoking the old diplomatic ties between the Kings of David and Hiram in I Kings 5:1-12. This designation presented Jesus as a regional Savior, in contrast to the ‘Judean Messiah’ concept that was introduced earlier in the gospel.¹⁹ The woman’s address of Jesus as ‘Lord’ places her in league with Jesus’ followers, in contrast to his enemies who call him ‘teacher’ or ‘Rabbi’.²⁰

Yet Jesus’ final remark to the Canaanite woman is in stark contrast to his previous dialogue with her. First addressing her as “woman,” he then compliments her great faith in contrast to the little faith he often points out among his disciples.²¹ Jesus’ use of the “woman” mirrors other intimate women in his life, including his mother, Mary Magdalene, the Samaritan woman, the adulteress saved from stoning, and a crippled woman he healed. These interactions usually occur in contexts where deep emotions are found.²²

¹⁷Rukundwa and van Aarde, *Revisiting Justice*, 943.

¹⁸Lee and Viljoen, *Healing*, 80.

¹⁹Rukundwa and Van Aarde, *Revisiting Justice*, 944.

²⁰D. B. Mel, “Jesus and the Canaanite Woman: An Exception for Exceptional Faith,” *Priscilla Papers* 23, no. 4 (2009), 9.

²¹Baffes, *Story of Reversal*, 10.

²²Baffes, *Story of Reversal*, 10.

Characters

The cast of characters in this story are provocative and their relationship with Jesus is, at first, seemingly antithetical to Matthew's gospel message. The characterization of the woman as "Canaanite" ethnically and religiously disqualifies her as a candidate for justice and righteousness in a Judean context. She is marginalized because of both her gender and her race, and economically excluded because of her class.²³ Matthew's primarily Jewish audience would have agreed with this characterization, resulting in a rhetoric of implication for the woman. Yet she is tenacious and unyielding to Jesus' resistance. She admits to what Jesus has said about the Gentiles, yet argues that, not wanting to diminish Israel's privileges, she only desires a crumb. Jesus' short parable did not discourage the woman. Rather the woman has understood the true intention of the parable with her deep faith and found the way to get Jesus' mercy.²⁴ Just her presence in the story forced Jesus to acknowledge her dignity, validity, and authenticity of her faith experience. This interaction probably also challenged the original audiences to move beyond an ethnocentric view of their world, especially in regard to the embrace of gentile non-believers.²⁵

Some suggest that Jesus seems to act more like the Pharisees and scribes in the story, which is not representative of his own thoughts. He has been compared to a teacher who draws out insight by challenging students with views that are not necessarily theirs. James Treat suggests that, "By uttering first the normal thought of Jewish people and

²³Rukundwa and Van Aarde, *Revisiting Justice*, 943.

²⁴Lee and Viljoen, *Healing*, 82.

²⁵James Treat, "The Canaanite Problem," *Daughters of Sarah* 20, no. 2 (1994), 24.

then by nullifying the saying itself with his healing activity, he empathetically shows and dramatically demonstrates that he was sent to the gentiles as well as the Jews.”²⁶ When the story is heard with this ending in mind, his initial rejection of the woman functions like an irony, moving the audience into rhetoric of empathy and identification with the woman.

However, Boomershine suggests that:

Treat’s proposal that Jesus’ initial rejection of the woman moves the audience “into a rhetoric of empathy and identification with the woman” is not accurate when the audience is heard as Judeans. Rather, it increases the audience’s empathy and identification with Jesus as an Israelite who responds with appropriate hostility to an inappropriate request by a Gentile. His positive response to her humility, acceptance of his caricature, and persistent plea is what creates an increase in the audience’s empathy with the woman. It is a concrete instance of Jesus doing what he advocates in his earlier sermon: “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you . . .” He does good for an enemy of Israel, a highly controversial move then and now. Itzak Rabin is a classic instance.²⁷

In this regard, Jesus functions as a wisdom sage whose method of teaching helped people to see more complex connections than they had ever realized before.²⁸ Some storytellers could have intentionally portrayed Jesus in the story as the learner (rather than teacher) so that he could demonstrate first-hand the transformation that needed to take place in the disciples and in the Jewish leaders.²⁹ His Messianic mission at first is

²⁶Treat, *Canaanite Problem*, 85.

²⁷Boomershine, *Lecture Notes*.

²⁸Lawrence Hart, “The Canaanite Woman: Meeting Jesus as Sage and Lord: Matthew 15:21-28 and Mark 7:24-30,” *Expository Times* 122, no. 1 (October 2010), 22.

²⁹Baffes, *Story of Reversal*, 18.

tribalistic, limited within cultural boundaries, but then changes depending on Israel's acceptance or rejection.³⁰

The disciples also play important roles in the story. Since disciples often play negative roles in other stories, some regard their exchange in this scene as an obstacle to the Canaanite woman's quest. Either the disciples wanted Jesus to send her away without granting her request, or their exchange could be interpreted as intervening on her behalf. The disciples are now implicated in this drama. If the audience initially identified with the disciples' response to the woman, then they are also implicated in their judgment. As the disciples pile up against the woman, Jesus agrees. Yet Jesus' response could also be understood a bit more smoothly if the disciples have asked Jesus to send her away by granting her request.³¹ Whichever it might be, Matthew makes a solution more difficult as the Canaanite woman faces antagonism, which is clearly expressed by Jesus.³²

Plot

The story appears directly after two other narratives about purity laws. In both of these passages the author connects these purity laws to the Pharisees, yet challenges their importance when placed next to the teachings of Jesus and the commandments of God. The stories also seem to be a tacit condemnation of the laws that separate clean from

³⁰Rukundwa and van Aarde, *Revisiting Justice*, 940.

³¹Lee and Viljoen, *Healing*, 80.

³²Lee and Viljoen, *Healing*, 81.

unclean and Jew from Gentile.³³ The rejection of these purity laws would have significant implications for the Jews in the audience.

In previous pericopes Matthew reports Jesus using parables to hide the mystery of the kingdom from some group and reveal it to another group (13:11-13). The parable Jesus tells to the woman is designed to test her faith.³⁴ The complications in the story increase tension and make a solution more difficult. These obstacles are what exactly the contemporary Jews would have expected from a Rabbi. Gentiles are not worthy getting divine mercy.³⁵ Yet in the final conclusion Jesus *does* listen to her request and heals her daughter. The parable is then, not Jesus' real intention, but sets the stage for his dramatic crossing of ethnic boundaries. Jesus' initial silence and harsh sayings are not designed to promote the idea of restraining Matthean community's mission from Gentiles. They are rhetorically inserted in the pericope and function as literary complications to test the faith of the Canaanite woman.³⁶ These complications are not uncommon to Jesus' healing stories, often resulting in catharsis and reversal of meaning.³⁷

Hart suggests that, "In this light, his harsh words could be understood not as an insult at all, but as spiritual direction akin in some ways to a modern psychotherapeutic confrontation—a 'reorientation through disorientation'."³⁸ The story follows a "U-shaped plot" characterized by a state of equilibrium at the start, followed by a disruption,

³³Baffes, *Story of Reversal*, 14-15.

³⁴Lee and Viljoen, *Healing*, 82.

³⁵Lee and Viljoen, *Healing*, 80.

³⁶Lee and Viljoen, *Healing*, 83.

³⁷Lee and Viljoen, *Healing*, 84.

³⁸Hart, *Jesus as Sage*, 25.

adversity or misunderstanding. At this lowest point a reversal, divine deliverance or awakening of a character turns things for the better. In a story like this, the character will recognize something of great importance that was previously hidden or unrecognized.³⁹

Storyteller

Attitude/Point of View

As mentioned in the preceding discussion of story, Matthew introduces three obstacles that make a solution complicated. Yet Jesus' responses are exactly what the original audience might have expected from a Jewish rabbi.⁴⁰ These anti-Gentile and disparaging features were most likely introduced in Matthew to serve the purpose of reversing expectations. Jesus *did* expand his ministry to a Gentile woman. This story is a dramatic example of Jesus confronting the clean-unclean separation in conversations with the disciples preceding the story. Jesus' initial callous rejection of her request is a dramatic device that enhances the effect of the message.⁴¹

Gestures or Facial Expressions

It is most likely that when this interaction between Jesus and the Canaanite woman was retold, much derogatory inflection, gestures or facial expressions would have been given to key words like "Tyre and Sidon," "Canaanite," "little dog," and "send her away." Yet in juxtaposition to these harsh sayings, lamenting and/or expressions of compassion would have been given to other key phrases like "Son of David," "have

³⁹Baffes, *Story of Reversal*, 18.

⁴⁰Lee and Viljoen, *Healing*, 82.

⁴¹Lee and Viljoen, *Healing*, 85.

mercy on me,” “Lord help me,” “woman,” and “great is your faith.” Specifically, the Jewish audience would have intimately connected to the powerful imagery elicited by words like “bread,” “lost sheep,” “children of the house of Israel,” and “crumbs from the table.”

Audience

Norms of Judgment

In Matthew 11:20-24, Jesus denounces the Jewish cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida, likening them to Tyre and Sidon. Yet it is only in these two Gentile cities that Matthew records Jesus healing only Gentiles. Lee and Viljoen suspect that “healings of Gentiles have meaning for Matthew and his community. The evangelist could have included Jesus’ healing of the Jews in those areas, but he did not. So his visit to Tyre and Sidon is seemingly intentional, not accidental.”⁴² The original audience would have understood this condemnation, yet also intrigued by Jesus’ journey there.

Jesus’ initial silence, following the absurdity of the Canaanite woman asking for such a healing request, would have been expected by the audience. There would be no logical reason for him to respond to a Gentile. His use of “bread” would also have significance. The Judean audiences could interpret it as a blessing of salvation or privilege of being beneficiaries of Jesus’ ministry. Gentiles are not worthy of the divine mercy and, therefore, of Jesus’ ministry. This is manifest to everyone. Everybody, including the Canaanite woman and the disciples, would have understood the meaning of

⁴²Lee and Viljoen, *Healing*, 78-79.

the parable this way.⁴³ Hart proposes, “Since bread is a complex Jewish and Christian symbol, it would have been difficult to miss the Eucharistic theme with its deep and manifold implications, or to not see its connection to the Wilderness manna, the feeding of the five thousand before this encounter, and the feeding of the four thousand after.”⁴⁴

Background Understandings

According to Deuteronomy 12:31, the Canaanites are described as an “abominable people, so monstrous that they even sacrifice their own children to their gods.” Katell Berthelot proposed that this characterization justifies the fact that they are to be expelled or utterly destroyed by the Hebrews when the latter enter the Land.⁴⁵ This destruction is justified by their sinful behavior and by Yahweh’s desire to keep Israel from imitating them. The book of Genesis implicitly connects the fate of Canaanites with that of their ancestor, Canaan, the son of Ham and grandson of Noah.⁴⁶ The curse of Canaan in the text is an allusion to the future fate of Canaanites at the time of their conquest. It is an explicit connection between the episode of Canaan’s curse and the biblical texts pertaining to the conquest.⁴⁷

Lee and Viljoen report that there are two significant changes in Matthew’s rendering of the story versus Mark. Tyre and Sidon are regularly paired and condemned

⁴³Lee and Viljoen, *Healing*, 81.

⁴⁴Hart, *Jesus as Sage*, 22.

⁴⁵Katell Berthelot, “The Canaanites Who ‘Trusted in God’: An Original Interpretation of the Fate of the Canaanites in Rabbinic Literature,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 62, no. 2 (September, 2011): 233.

⁴⁶Katell Berthelot, “The Original Sin of the Canaanites,” *The ‘Other’ in Second Temple Judaism: Essays in Honor of John J. Collins* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2011), 50.

⁴⁷Berthelot, *Original Sin*, 56.

as ‘typical heathen cities’ and dangerous enemies in the Old Testament. Matthew introduces the woman with the derogatory term, Canaanite. Mark calls her as a Syro-Phoenician, a rather neutral term.⁴⁸ Some suggest that Matthew was influenced by the cultural conflict that had existed between Israelite and Canaanite communities since the conquest. Yet the good relations between Israel and Tyre and Sidon during the Davidic reign influenced subsequent commercial relations with Judea. During the anti-colonial wars between 66 and 70 C.E., the Judean population was protected by population of Sidon as an anti-Judean campaign swept through the region.

Overall Impact

Glenda Jackson imagines that Matthew’s reference to these Gentile cities conjured up two images. “...the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon are an intelligent, skilled people who give generously to the kings of Israel, and used by God to offer help in time of need.” However, “they are often described as enemies of Israel because of their foreign gods, and consequently serve as the victims of God’s wrath on many occasions.”⁴⁹ Matthew depends upon the audience to contextualize this dichotomy and uses the historic Canaanite setting to propose a solution to the debate between Jews and Gentiles in the community. Although the Canaanites as a historical people did not exist in the first

⁴⁸Lee and Viljoen, *Healing*, 79.

⁴⁹G. S. Jackson, “Enemies of Israel: Ruth and the Canaanite Woman,” *HTS Theologies/Theological Studies* 59, no. 3 (2003), 784.

century, the term was recognizable as a vicious epithet toward anybody who was considered contemptible to the Jews.⁵⁰

Matthew's general emphasis on Jewish scripture and law suggests a predominately Jewish audience. Yet Boomershine, Melanie Baffes and others suggest that Jesus' missionary work among the Gentiles indicates that the audience for this Gospel was most likely a combination of Jews and Gentiles.⁵¹ Baffes notes that the broader socio-cultural context of the audience first hearing the gospel seems to be slightly different from the social world depicted in the story:

During the time of Jesus' ministry, women played a prominent role, accompanying Jesus on his journeys, providing financial and other support, and being present on his final trip to Jerusalem and at his crucifixion. But, by the time Matthew's Gospel was written some 30 years later, the situation was changing; near the end of the first century, women began facing serious challenges from those opposed to their having status or holding positions of power. Yet the author of Matthew, in direct contrast to the prevailing ethos of the time, portrays women in the text as having worth, purpose, and dignity.⁵²

In the context of the Canaanite woman's story, the audience would have been surprised and curious by this early first-century Mediterranean world. Baffes asserts that the concepts of women, Gentiles and marginalized persons having status, power and authority would have been heard in the text as a discrepancy between the ideal and their reality. "They would have understood the call to be radically welcoming, to include everyone in the Matthean community."⁵³

⁵⁰Jackson, *Enemies*, 785.

⁵¹Baffes, *Story of Reversal*, 13.

⁵²Baffes, *Story of Reversal*, 14.

⁵³Baffes, *Story of Reversal*, 14.

This message would have also connected the audience to the Old Testament story of Ruth the Moabite, bringing to mind their knowledge of its paradigm of proselytism. Matthew mentions Ruth in the genealogy of Jesus, with its inclusion of the four women who are enemies of Israel (Canaanites Tamar and Rahab, Ruth the Moabite, and the Hittite Bathsheba.) Jackson draws a comparison between the Canaanite woman's story and the story of Ruth. She believes that, "since Moabites and Canaanites are both designated enemies of Israel, Matthew's Canaanite woman is an imitation of the story of Ruth: if the Canaanite woman is allowed to follow Jesus, she will be allowed to gain entry into the community."⁵⁴ Because the first century audience knows the story of Ruth, they could bring knowledge of her role as proselyte to the new story of the Canaanite woman as well as its understanding in a Jewish context.⁵⁵

Impact of a Biblical Storytelling Hermeneutic

This exploration of the Canaanite woman's story from a performance criticism perspective identified significant implications for Jesus' ministry and has suggested probable impact on the original audiences hearing it. However, it also has implications for the contemporary audience hearing it. In the several times this story was told during the research project, a variety of responses was encountered. I first told this story in a progressive Congregational setting with a characterization of Jesus that was intended to create distance between him and the Canaanite woman. This Jesus had a sarcastic tone and was portrayed with gestures that discounted the woman's value, while the Canaanite

⁵⁴Jackson, *Enemies*, 787.

⁵⁵Jackson, *Enemies*, 790.

woman was characterized as docile, weak, and acquiescent. Following the telling, a congregant approached me with some concerns about this portrayal. She confessed that her experience of the telling as an audience member was very negative. She was offended by the portrayal of Jesus as aloof, indignant and sarcastic. Her experience of this characterization of Jesus was quite emotional.

After agreeing to be in dialogue, a discussion ensued about these emotions. The congregant then revealed memories of her own experience growing up with loud TV evangelists blaring through the television and filling her childhood home with confrontational rhetoric. She admitted how much these programs damaged her and could not imagine Jesus having the same temperament. "I do not want to experience a sarcastic Jesus. I have had too much of that in my life and I cannot bear it again." A discussion about the emotional state of Jesus and the likelihood of a variety of emotions he expressed ensued. The portrayal of a timid Canaanite woman was also an opportunity to discuss the congregant's own experience of such interactions. The conversation opened opportunities for pastoral care, and provided an alternative perspective for a retelling of the story.

The second telling of the story occurred in a seminary context. Students from a variety of Protestant traditions were in the audience. The preacher for the day was a spirited African-American woman on staff as the professor of evangelism. The portrayal of Jesus in this telling was more subdued and less provocative. Yet the characterization of the Canaanite woman was again grounded in her timidity and acquiescence to Jesus. When the professor began preaching she imagined a different response by the Canaanite woman. "If I were the Canaanite woman, I would've stood up to Jesus and demanded his

attention. The realities of her circumstance would have called for a greater emotional response.” This alternative perspective presented yet another way to envision the relationship between Jesus and the woman, and inspired the storyteller to explore an alternative characterization of her.

A third telling of the story occurred among doctoral colleagues in a workshop setting. The characterization of Jesus was that of wisdom teacher or Sage, while the Canaanite woman was portrayed as loud, outspoken and demanding. The juxtaposition of these two characterizations gave new meaning of the narratives for the storyteller. The ongoing interaction of teller and audience continued to bring out nuances in the story that would not have otherwise been considered in a reading. Therein lays the importance and impact of performance criticism for a contemporary connection to the biblical narratives.

This chapter summarized the historical/source criticism method and its impact on communities of faith, particularly the Historical Jesus movement. Subsequent disagreements presented in the writings of Hans Frei, Walter Wink, and Thomas Boomershine were proposed in order to explain the bankruptcy of this hermeneutic for progressive Christians. The chapter then identified differences between interpreting the biblical narratives from a “meaning as ideal reference” and “meaning as ostensive reference” and offered an understanding of performance criticism as a new hermeneutic grounded in “meaning as experience.” This redefined relationship with God and Jesus was explored as the foundation for reengaging the biblical narratives in a progressive context. Finally, the performance criticism hermeneutic was applied to the story of Jesus and the Canaanite woman from the gospel of Matthew with the intent to explore its original meaning for the first audiences of the Gospels. A perspective of “Audience

Address” was utilized to evaluate these meanings for a postmodern progressive Christian context.

But in order to fully experience the integration of our stories with the sacred story, the biblical narratives need to be ‘heard’ as relevant. This project investigated biblical storytelling and performance criticism as a new hermeneutic for exploring this comprehensive story of humankind on earth. Yet this exploration required an appropriate theological method for reflection. Chapter four investigates Process Thought and “Meaning as Experience” as two dimensions of this new hermeneutic: redefining relationship with—and a connection to—a relational God and an experiential Jesus.

CHAPTER FOUR

DIMENSIONS OF THE HERMENEUTIC

Process Thought as Theological Dimension

Pastor Mike's encouragement to pursue deeper theological engagement of the quest for the historical Jesus influenced this researcher to attend seminary at United. This search for a systematic theology that enabled a critical view of biblical texts, yet embraced the vital role of scripture, reason, tradition, and experience (Wesley's quadrilateral) led to an investigation of Process Theology during theological education. This investigation and subsequent experimentation with relationship processes provided the basis for reflecting theologically during the project. What follows is a summary of process thought, and its application to this research.

Definitions of Process Theology

While there are numerous 'streams' of process theology and many divergent agendas for process theologians, the theological foundations for this project are grounded in the research and writing of the Center for Process Studies at Claremont Theological Seminary. These examples are not inclusive, but do illustrate many of the principles developed by Alfred Whitehead and adopted by most process theologians

1. All reality is energy, being composed of a complex combination of energy events. There is no such thing as spiritual matter versus physical matter. God and our spirits are energy events, just as is everything else.

2. The building blocks of the universe are bursts of energy, each coming into being and fading away in a split second. Alfred Whitehead calls them energy events or actual occasions of experience.
3. Process is the becoming (or "taking shape") of energy events or actual occasions of experience. The emergence of the subjective aim (or guiding principle) of the energy event, determines how the energy event in the process of becoming shall shape itself.
4. God's role in this continuing creation lies in God's giving of the initial aim to each energy event as it begins to create itself.
5. God never creates alone! Past energy events (cause and effect) and the subjectivity or freedom of present energy events in the process of becoming also effect the shape reality is taking.
6. Therefore, there are limits on Divine power, as God has to work with what is given and is unable to exclusively determine the outcome at any given moment. God is the supreme, but not the exclusive factor, influencing the process or forward movement of reality.
7. Consequently, God has no master plan that is slowly but surely being put into effect. The future is genuinely open, and neither God nor we nor anything else can know with definiteness what tomorrow will be like. But God, nevertheless, is always at work seeking to create greater beauty.
8. It follows that God has a circumstantial will. That is, God must constantly readjust God's will to meet the changing circumstances of the rest of reality, seeking at every moment to influence (through the initial aim) energy events to choose options that will lead reality toward greater beauty.
9. Creation (including humankind) is never the absolute ideal, from God's perspective, because God is often defied in the direction God desires energy events to take. Thus, reality at any given moment is simply the best possible situation (from God's perspective) given the circumstances with which God has to work.
10. The power of God is persuasion (calling energy events forward through the initial aim) and not force. Because that persuasion has been able to bring forth magnificent creation, it is evident that God has the necessary power to profoundly affect and shape the universe, and to inspire awe and worship in us.
11. All energy events are subjects, with some measure of control over their own destinies. God and our spirits, as extremely complex energy events, are capable of self-consciousness and the emotions that accompany self-consciousness.

12. Process always has been; meaning there never was a start, a creation from nothing. There is no final end to creation; it shall go on eternally.

13. Given Whitehead's thought, evolution can be seen as a helpful guide to understanding God.

14. There is ground for hope, because God is constantly at work seeking to lead all of reality toward a better tomorrow. However, there is no room for sweeping optimism, for God's will can be frustrated by the events of the rest of physical reality. .¹

This understanding of a “relational God” and the “process of becoming” for creation influenced the design and facilitation of reflective strategies for the project.

Relationship as “Process of Becoming”

Whitehead’s “relationship of becoming” has been more recently explained by process theologian Marjorie Suchocki. Her understanding of process theology, that “all reality is relational and power comes from reality through relation,” was liberating.² But it was also intensely challenging. Suchocki’s perspective suggests that we have the unique opportunity and responsibility to engage and realize our ultimate reality by faithfully pursuing this relationship with God. The journey no longer has a beginning and an end. The journey now becomes a dynamic experience of faith seeking opportunities to discover possibilities. The destination is no longer heaven or hell. The destination is a deeper intimacy with the one who called us into being. Pastoral theologian Carolyn Bohler suggests that, “while our present reality may be limited by our choices in the past,

¹William Stegall, “A Perspective from Process Theology,” *The Process and Faith Program of the Center for Process Studies* (Claremont, CA: Claremont Theological Seminary, 1994), accessed January 24, 2015, www.ctr4process.org/about/process/GodUniverse.shtml.

²Marjorie Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church: A Practical Guide to Process Theology* (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1982), 29.

the possibility of making new choices in the present can lead to a harmonic future compatible with God's aims for the world, given what it is now. God's best possibilities for our future, given the present, are available."³ While we are not predestined to choose them, God gives us the free will to do so. Our contribution to this progressive journey is making those choices that move us forward, no matter what we chose in the past.⁴ This is the essence of a progressive faith.

The application of these theological processes on the project had an important goal; to present a God who is present and participates in our spiritual journeys—to discern our relationship with a God who is engaged in our decisions and choices for a better reality. The influence of this presence and participation has the potential to move us beyond passive faith and encourage us to actively trust God's initial aim for our best reality. We can trust because the character of "God as Wisdom" knows the infinite possibilities of our future and works consistently to harmonize our past and present toward a transforming future.⁵ This transforming future is the achievement of justice. The eminence of "God as Power" assures that this is God's initial aim. It confirms that God and justice are the same thing. Whether or not that justice is achieved, is the responsibility of God's creation choosing it.⁶ It places the responsibility on the pilgrim to seek revelations of God that transform God's initial aim into God's best actual occasion.

³Carolyn Jayne Bohler, *Doctoral Defense Notes*, (Dayton, OH: United Theological Seminary, March, 2015).

⁴Bohler, *Doctoral Defense Notes*.

⁵Suchocki, *Process Theology*, 72.

⁶Suchocki, *Process Theology*, 82.

All the while, God is there creating and wanting and offering us the best and ultimate reality.

Jesus as Model of Relationship with God

Another significant perspective of process thought for engaging project participants in the research was the understanding of the Jesus narratives as a testimony of relationship between humans and a relational God. The earlier exploration of the historical Jesus movement at HCC challenged participants to deconstruct Jesus the Christ presented in the sacred scriptures. The search for the historical Jesus challenged whether we could tell the story of Christ apart from the concept of a classical theistic God. From our study of this “hermeneutic of suspicion” it became clear that Jesus the Christ was an earthly portrait of the classical theistic God. To reject the image of a classical theistic God also challenged us to reject the image of Jesus as the divine Christ. Process theology reevaluated these biblical narratives from a relational paradigm. In this paradigm, Jesus’ testimony revealed the essence of “God as Presence.” Yet this “God of Presence” can also be revealed through other faith practitioners, in spite of and because of our own humanity. Historical studies alone could not provide access to Jesus of Nazareth.⁷

This disagreement has raised other crucial questions in this research: from whom do we receive atonement then, if not from Jesus Christ? Some progressives believe that we can confess that Jesus Christ is Lord without subscribing to a belief in his divinity as defined by a virgin birth, sacrificial act of atonement on the cross, a physical resurrection and final supernatural ascension. But this rejection of the fundamental teaching of

⁷Michael Jenkins, *Invitation to Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 104.

Christ's lordship does not pose a problem of loyalty as some suggest it should.⁸ Process theology, expressed through the methodology of performance criticism, should provide a way to discover relationship with Jesus outside a classical theistic perspective.

I acknowledge that this redefinition may not be achievable, especially considering the exhaustive work of the conservative and liberal Church over the last century to keep itself confined either under the canopy of a classical theistic dogma or academic intellectualism. But process theology provides special insight when considering relationship with Jesus Christ as foundational for Christian formation. Suchocki suggests that since all knowledge is conditioned by perspective, then a consideration of God based on a process analysis of the world and accomplished from a Christian frame of reference influences our conclusions.⁹ Therefore the vision of a redemptive God of presence, wisdom, and power could be revealed in the testimony of Jesus Christ. How can a process theology perspective harmonize the dissonance between the divine Christ and the historical Jesus for progressive Christians?

A "Meaning as Experience" Pedagogy for Spiritual Formation

Peters' hermeneutical question raised in this paper's introduction grounded the inquiry for investigating biblical storytelling and performance criticism as a means for reauthorizing the sacred stories for spiritual formation. This question was also the basis for appropriating process thought as the theological paradigm for discerning that spiritual formation. A reminder of that question follows:

⁸Jenkins, *Invitation*, 120.

⁹Suchocki, *Process Theology*, 87.

How can the Christian faith, first experienced and symbolically articulated in an ancient culture now long out-of-date, speak meaningfully to human existence today as we experience it amid a worldview dominated by natural science, secular self-understanding, and the worldwide cry for freedom?¹⁰

Appropriating a viable theological paradigm that engages the ancient symbols of God's revelation in such a way that enables them to emit new meaning for a post-modern progressive context was the next step in this research. Dr. Carolyn Bohler has reflected that the 'image' we share in common with God is to be 'image makers,' to be able to create, to visualize, and to imagine. Our metaphors point to the God we believe in, and that pointing is experiential.¹¹ The process of reclaiming these ancient symbols of God's revelation for a post-modern progressive context begins with naming other options for considering God. Will this new paradigm have the power to emit new dimensions of understanding? Bohler believes that is an inherent quality of God, who "helps to reveal new dimensions to us when we need them. If or when we have what we call 'unbelief,' maybe what is happening is that we are entering a new dimension. Maybe we are about to discover God in a way that brings new meaning, even more joy, to our lives."¹² This theological method is not about giving up or letting go of our understanding of God in order to make room for a new one, but finding metaphors that "creatively point to what we believe." A challenge for this research was designing an environment whereby participants might discover those metaphors which, as Bohler observes, "limit, or conflict, with our sense of God, and [discovering] which metaphors revitalize or increase

¹⁰Peters, *God*, 7.

¹¹Carolyn Jayne Bohler, *God the What? What Our Metaphors for God Reveal about Our Beliefs in God* (Woodstock, VT: SkyPath Publishing, 2008), xiii.

¹²Bohler, *Metaphors*, 2.

our perception.”¹³ Several reflective activities from Bohler’s book were utilized to offer those opportunities throughout the research (see Appendices B and C on DVD).

This research investigated the proposition that engaging a biblical storytelling hermeneutic and a process theology paradigm with the ancient symbols of God’s revelation can emit new meaning for a post-modern progressive context. The beginnings of a process way of seeing the biblical narratives as a conversational partner for the dialogical reinterpretation of Jesus began with discovering important connections between the participants and this testimony. Performance criticism was utilized to engage the biblical narratives of Jesus in order to make those connections. The theological paradigm for internalizing those connections and making new meaning was Process Thought. That journey of new meaning making is progressive theology in praxis.

The Dimension of “Meaning as Experience”

From “Meaning as Reference” to “Meaning as Experience”

The systems of biblical interpretation since the second century are based on and for the culture of literacy. And while these ideas are defined by referential meanings in the three major literate systems—manuscript, print, and document culture—all share the same basic assumptions of the Bible as a primary source of ideas. Boomershine suggests:

We now live in the first post literate culture in the history of human civilization. This digital electronic culture communication system is relativizing everything that we have known since that time. So given the possibility of correlations between major changes between digital communication culture and biblical interpretation, in that context Christianity must develop a new interpretive system that will make sense of the Bible in a digital culture. The basic assumption of

¹³Bohler, *Metaphors*, 7.

digital culture is that meaning is shaped not by reference but by experience. If we do not experience it—it has no meaning. If it does not touch me in any way I do not care about it.¹⁴

So how then do we reinterpret the Bible in the context of digital culture yet grounded in scholarly study that is rational? The storytelling hermeneutic of some churches, expressed through multi-media and digital communications, are highly experiential. This story form of communication connects biblical stories to the everyday experience of participants. These compelling experiences have enormous emotional and devotional impact. Yet many mainline churches do not study the stories anymore as stories; they are often studied as sources of theology and vast historical and theological meanings are constructed to explain them. The stories have literally disappeared. Yet culture is no longer shaped by the arguments between these two systems—idealism and empiricism.¹⁵

The assumption that the Bible was a text read by readers in silence is historically false. Yet a performance criticism paradigm enables us to reconstruct how the Bible was experienced in its original context. It was heard, internalized, and the storytelling dynamic shaped the memory of its listeners. Memory was an essential component of its meaning in its original context. Boomershine further argues that memory of biblical stories is connected with hearing: “with story, the dominant perceptual system is the ear recording the sounds of the story that are being produced by the storyteller.”¹⁶ The hermeneutics of the basic systems of meaning in digital culture have direct connection to

¹⁴Boomershine, *Lecture Notes*.

¹⁵Boomershine, *Lecture Notes*.

¹⁶Boomershine, *NBS Seminar*, 9.

the oral culture in which the original biblical narratives were experienced. From that ancient world to the present world, global digital culture is still dominantly an oral culture. Performance criticism is the development of an experiential hermeneutic in digital culture based on a reinterpretation of the Bible as a source of experience versus reference. Telling the biblical stories from memory has experiential viability, since it is interpreted through the experience of the person and the community.¹⁷ A definition of social memory construction for the development of meaning in communities is crucial for understanding this experiential viability.

The Impact of Social Memory

Anthony Le Donne and Tom Thatcher proposed an exploration of social memory in ancient media studies as a means for understanding patterns of communication and reconstructing cognitive processes and identity formation in oral culture. They, and other social memory theorists, suggests that memory adapts the realities (and reflection) of the past to the needs of the present. Because memory is foundational for the creation of a collective identity that has continuity with earlier generations, memory perceived outside social frameworks are always constrained by the social context.¹⁸ When memory is considered more than recollection, but as a dynamic collective dialogue requiring constant redefinition, stories are constructed and organized into narrative presentations. These narrative presentations hold the values and power relationships that drive a

¹⁷Boomershine, *Lecture Notes*.

¹⁸Anthony Le Donne and Tom Thatcher, "Introducing Media Culture to Johannine Studies: Orality, Performance and Memory," *The Fourth Gospel in First-Century Media Culture* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2011), 6.

community's pattern of socialization and domination. These collective memory dynamics had significant influence on the evolution of biblical texts.¹⁹ Le Donne and Thatcher suggest that social memory theory can help to illuminate the structure, values, and identity of the communities for whom the biblical narratives were performed. From this view there is less concern for the content of the "artifacts of these memories" or its potential historical value. This theory supports the significance of performance criticism when considering the original audiences of the biblical narratives.

Barry Schwartz, a leading authority on social memory theory, acknowledges two perspectives for considering the development and evolution of social memory. The "presentist" perspective suggests that changes in social memory are related to changes in the problems and concerns of the environment in which the past is invoked. The "traditionalist" perspective ties memory closer to historical realities than to current social developments. Both of these perspectives rely on the proposition that the artifacts of the past will resist deconstruction and reconstruction. The past will always resist revision and maintain integrity.²⁰ Schwartz suggests that "the ultimate authority behind the spoken word is the text; and behind the text, the actuality. The written gospel, then, does not silence orality... rather, it achieves fulfillment through oral narration."²¹ Schwartz believes that while written and oral communications may have portrayed Jesus differently, this difference was relatively trivial. Reading the stories or hearing the stories formed the same conceptions. Schwartz concludes that writing and orality are different

¹⁹Le Donne and Thatcher, *Fourth Gospel*, 8.

²⁰Barry Swartz, "What Difference Does the Medium Make?" *The Fourth Gospel in First-Century Media Culture*, (New York, NY: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2011), 231-32.

²¹Swartz, *What Difference*, 233.

articulations of the same message. These observations are inconsistent with the biblical storytelling paradigm.

However, Le Donne suggests that social memory can be manifested in more forms than just verbal or written language. Memories can be expressed through ritual and the arts. However, when “memory is translated into language it must conform to the accepted semantic frameworks of its context.” Le Donne asserts, “collective memory creates ‘social frameworks’ in which individual memories must be localized if they are to have meaning.” Semantic frameworks such as vocabulary, syntax, grammar, metaphor, and genre act as social frameworks.²² When traditions are articulated, they must be given meaning appropriate to the context, or the genre, in which it was articulated. The transition of memory to language involves not only translation, but also interpretation. Therefore, the meaning or significance of the memory is formed and reformed by the context of its articulation.²³ In contemporary contexts (and specifically the progressive context of this project), memories of the past need to make sense in the present. If those memories—whether individual or collective—are painful and oppressive, then new meaning-making must reinforce experiences and create memories that have integrity and credibility. This project proposed biblical storytelling and performance criticism as a new hermeneutic for healing painful memories of the past.

But what about this emerging hermeneutic is experientially viable? “Meaning as experience” does not necessarily equate as emotional worship. Rather “meaning as experience” comes from internalizing the stories. While “meaning as reference”

²²Anthony Le Donne, *The Historiographical Jesus: Memory, Typology, and the Son of David* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009), 48.

²³Le Donne, *Historiographical Jesus*, 53.

investigates the sources of the story, “meaning as experience” seeks to experience the story in its final form and discover its original context. We then connect that new experience to contemporary life, and then articulate those connections in a community of trust. Experiential viability occurs when the Bible is reinterpreted as stories and letters and performed for audiences as it had been in the ancient world. Interpreting the Bible in that framework will have meaning and energy for people in this digital culture.²⁴

This is an effort to reframe the experience of Christianity grounded in an experience of the sacred stories. Boomershine suggests that the meaning of a story is directly related to the dynamics of the relationship between storyteller and audience. They are co-creators of the story experience. The meaning of the story is shaped by this interaction in profound ways.²⁵ This project asserts that biblical storytelling can engage a “meaning as experience” hermeneutic. The building of community trust was a critical social framework for exploring the “meaning as experience” paradigm. The role of storyteller as performer and interpreter of the biblical narratives was key to building that trust. Chapter five outlines storytelling as a theoretical foundation for translating “meaning as experience” into pedagogical strategies for reconnection and spiritual formation.

²⁴Boomershine, *Lecture Notes*.

²⁵Boomershine, *NBS Seminar*, 11.

CHAPTER FIVE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

The Theory of Storytelling

The appropriation of biblical storytelling as an alternative discourse to the traditional ‘presentation’ of the Gospel narratives in religious contexts begins with a study of storytelling history and method utilizing the resources of storytellers and story-listeners from a broad range of experience and culture. These resources help to weave the stories of humankind from many spiritual and philosophical paths into a spirituality that creates mystery and engagement with the subjects and themes within biblical narratives. Biblical storytellers need powerful and effective tools for telling the Gospel story in ways that can inspire disciples, transform negative and limiting patterns of behavior, and draw God seekers into deeper relationship. A look into the historical and cross-cultural origins of storytelling as well as an analysis of its function in society can provide insight for the merging of storytelling with evangelization. Our lives are filled with stories, parables and fairytales that teach us hidden truths about ourselves and lessons to be learned about each other. I will present these functions of storytelling gleaned from this spiritual history while defining common themes and actions.

The History of Storytelling

Most of us remember our childhood as filled with stories—stories we were told or stories that we told ourselves. Stories taught us how to listen and how to communicate. Stories taught us how to dream, how to interpret our own lives and how to interact with others. Stories taught us the meaning of morality and ethics and how to function in society. Stories introduced us to the skills that we would need to resolve problems and develop relationships. For many of us, story was our greatest teacher. Why then, as adults, did we abandon one of the greatest teaching assistants ever known to humankind? Some have reclaimed the art of storytelling, and have initiated a renaissance that is sweeping the world. What other cultures have recognized for a millennium has finally come to the West.

Since 1973 the National Storytelling Network has helped to increase the notoriety of the storyteller. Currently there are 187 professional full-time storytellers nationwide. Published books on the subject have increased from half a dozen ten years ago to dozens a year. Mainstream culture has adopted a storytelling format in radio, television and the movies. Robin Moore sites programs like Garrison Keillor's "Prairie Home Companion" and "American Radio Theater," full-length motion pictures like *My Dinner with André* and Spaulding Gray's *Swimming to Cambodia* and the PBS television series *The Power of Myth* as evidence of mainstream culture's romance with storytelling.¹ In the new millennium, storytelling can be used in ever-increasing ways; to teach us about our environment, educate us about the diversity of culture, strengthen our sense of community, and mediate our differences.

¹Robin Moore, *Awakening the Hidden Storyteller* (Boston, MA: Shambhala, 1991), 9.

But what about the origins of storytelling? Margaret Read MacDonald believes that the excitement generated today by the renaissance of storytelling heralds that of new discoveries: “Its roots are as old as the human race. Surely, the ancient drawings that decorate our ancestors’ caves must have been a visual record of a story being told in that time.”² For instance, some of the earliest recorded story texts were imprinted on clay tablets by Middle Eastern societies nearly four thousand years ago.

One such Babylonian tale begins:

After God had created heaven,
 heaven created earth,
 earth created rivers,
 rivers created ditches,
 ditches created mud,
 mud created the worm.³

MacDonald also reports that early in this century the Arctic explorer Knud Radmussen collected Eskimo tales of heroes confronting creatures resembling mammoths. Theodor Gaster presented translations of Assyrian, Babylonian, Canaanite, and Hittite stories found on cuneiform tables—the oldest dating from around 1600 B.C.⁴

Janet Litherland recounts the recording of stories from the Greek and Hebrew texts of the Bible. She suggests that: “Many stories, as they are passed from generation to generation, take on characteristics and attitudes of the times. Likewise, stories passed from culture to culture absorb elements of each culture.”⁵ That is why you may hear the

²Margaret Read MacDonald, *The Storyteller's Start-Up Book* (Little Rock, AR: August House, Inc., 1993), 15.

³Theodor Gaster, *Oldest Stories of the World* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1952), 93.

⁴MacDonald, *Start-Up Book*, 15.

⁵Janet Litherland, *Storytelling From the Bible* (Colorado Springs, CO: Meriwether Publishing, Ltd., 1991), 8.

same stories, even biblical stories, told with different slants or with different points of emphasis. She compared parables recorded by translators of *The King James Version* of the Bible with the American Bible Society's translation, the *Good News Bible*. Modern, interpretive Bibles present the scriptures in a more story like fashion, often times using contemporary points of view from Bible commentaries and dictionaries to fill in background information.⁶ These story editorials link us with our heritage, from who we were, to who we are, to who we will become.

The Function of Storytelling

Donald Davis defines the basic function of storytelling as "identity maintenance." We tell stories to remind ourselves of who we are and to tell others who we are. He suggests that this identity function is operative in emerging national and cultural groups.⁷ Davis argues that the narratives of the Old Testament are the stories told by the people of Israel both to remind themselves and to tell others who they are. We find the same to be true as we look at other traditional/cultural literature, both oral and written, at various time periods around the world. Wherever we find a person or group of people who have a strong primary concern with identity, we will find stories and storytelling. This is true today as well as in past generations.⁸

However, the opposite of identity maintenance is "fortune seeking." As Davis suggests, "when a person or community is more interested in fortune seeking than in

⁶Litherland, *Storytelling*, 8.

⁷Donald Davis, *Telling Your Own Stories* (Little Rock, AR: August House, Inc., 1993), 107.

⁸Davis, *Telling*, 108.

identity maintenance, stories are left behind and storytelling dies.”⁹ This distinction can be seen on both macrocosmic and microcosmic levels. On the macrocosmic level, we can notice that storytelling is alive in small towns and communities where “who we are” is more important than “what we do”. We do not find storytelling alive in growing urban communities where we have moved both to seek our fortune and to get away from where we grew up.¹⁰

Storytelling is also alive within groups of migrating peoples who are moving in order to maintain and preserve who they are. We do not find storytelling with individual immigrants who have left home to get away from their old life. The microcosmic version can be seen in the series of developmental stages each of us goes through in the course of our lives. As children, the stories shared within our family are comforting to us and help us to form our basic identity and to know who we are as a family group. But when we enter adolescence and then young adulthood, we tend to abandon the family stories, including their values and structures and habits, as we step out into our own lives and seek the personal identity associated with seeking our own fortune. As adults we tell others very little about where we came from.¹¹

MacDonald also asserts that, “through story we begin to understand ourselves. Story helps us see, helps us verbalize, points up hidden messages from our lives.”¹² Daniel Taylor addresses the paradox of seeking happiness, self-esteem, fulfillment and

⁹Davis, *Telling*, 108.

¹⁰Davis, *Telling*, 109.

¹¹Davis, *Telling*, 110.

¹²MacDonald, *Start-Up Book*, 15.

self-actualization in ways that produce misery, disrespect, emptiness and failure. He believes that our greatest desire, greater even than the desire for happiness, is that our lives mean something. This desire for meaning is the originating impulse of story. Stories link past, present and future in a way that tell us where we have been, where we are and where we are going. Stories can help us act confidently and effectively in the world by understanding that we are characters in a story that we share with other characters. Taylor asserts that realizing our role as characters with meaningful roles takes us out of ourselves and into a community of characters who share interwoven stories.¹³ This community of characters can provide the means for realizing that our lives mean something, and that meaning has integrity and credibility.

Stories also help us see how choices and events are tied together, why things are and how things could be. They teach us that character is more important than personality and the more conscious we are about our stories and our role as characters in them, the more clarity we have about who we are and why we are here and how we should act in the world. Once we see ourselves as active characters, we have the power to transform lives. Taylor believes that seeing our lives as stories is more than a powerful metaphor. It is how experience presents itself to us. By better understanding story, and our role as characters, we can live more purposefully the kind of life that will give our own story meaning.¹⁴

¹³Daniel Taylor, *The Healing Powers of Story: Creating Yourself Through the Stories of Your Life* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1996), 1.

¹⁴Taylor, *Healing Powers*.

Erica Helm Meade has identified thirteen healing powers of story. This spiritual perspective describes the function of storytelling most applicable to the biblical storytelling paradigm. Meade has recorded the stories of women and revealed essential truths from the storytelling process. I believe that these truths are vital for the biblical storyteller to recognize during the storytelling experience. These truths can provide structure for the discourse and illicit critical reflection upon the biblical stories.¹⁵

The Healing Powers of Story

First Healing Power of Story: Arousing Strong Emotions

Meade suggests that we heal best when we are powerfully engaged. When genuine emotions heat up and come to the surface, the psyche grows ripe for change, and new learning makes a deep impression.¹⁶ Other theorists agree with Meade. John Burton, a provocative political scientist, suggested that resolving deep-rooted conflicts requires a form of facilitation that provokes escalation in dialogue between the parties. The escalation of verbal conflict is designed to bring to the surface the strongly felt issues, rather than attempting to reduce tensions by moderating language and promoting improved relationships. In practice, it is often only at the point of seeming impasse that the analysis reveals the underlying issues generating the conflict. However, Meade

¹⁵Erica Helm Meade, *Tell It By Heart: Woman and the Healing Power of Story* (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 1995), 242.

¹⁶Meade, *Tell It By Heart*, 243.

suggests that the storytelling process, more manageable and structured in dialogue than what Burton suggests, can allow emotions to rise without violating mutual respect.¹⁷

Second Healing Power of Story: Identifying with Others

In a world where identity is ever changing, diversity and culture are becoming buzz words for education, business and even religious institutions. Debra Sanders has been researching the relationship between identity and conflict from the perspective of several disciplines. She defines identity as an inner, basic core for the construction of self, character, and personality. The social category with which one identifies fashions a person's outer core identity. Conflict occurs at the intersection of the individual and society. It is her observation that a key indicator of identity is behavior. How that behavior is interpreted is based on the observer's philosophical and methodological orientation(s).¹⁸ Meade further suggests that storytelling can help bridge the gap between perception and reality by helping the teller educate the listener. This process can affect our understanding of behavior through "paradigm shifting." The changing of one's paradigm can be a transformative result from the biblical storytelling process. To produce a better discernment of one's identity and resulting behavior could be the product of a successful storytelling experience.¹⁹

The process of paradigm shifting most frequently occurs as a response to incidents outside our control. When our idea of how things are begins to change, we must

¹⁷John Burton, *Conflict Resolution as a Political System*, Working Paper (Fairfax, VA: Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, George Mason University, 1988), 8.

¹⁸Debra Sanders, *Identity and Conflict*, Working Paper (Washington D.C.: George Mason University, 1996), lecture outline.

¹⁹Meade, *Tell It By Heart*, 243.

rely on our own means of surviving to navigate through these changes. Emotions like anger, resentment, betrayal or abandonment tend to surface and adversely affect the process of change. It can be productive for the storyteller to harness unproductive emotions by facilitating the understanding of differing paradigms among hearers. Larry S. Fong describes a paradigm as: “the rules of the game, the way things are, parameters, or boundaries and how you navigate through these boundaries.” It is the way we perceive our surroundings. Often these perceptions are fashioned by our family relationships.²⁰

Third Healing Power of Story: Helping to Externalize a Conflict.

Temporary distance makes room for reflection. Meade suggests that storytelling can provide opportunity for reflecting on conflict from the perspective of the storyteller.²¹ Donald A. Schön argues that professional education should be centered on enhancing the practitioner’s ability for “reflection-in-action,” that is; learning by doing and developing the ability for continued learning and problem solving throughout the professional’s career. Perhaps the lack of this kind of training has resulted in the complex interpersonal, organizational, and international conflicts in our culture, and the inability to solve them ourselves.²² Storytelling may just be the needed curriculum for this kind of learning.

²⁰Larry S. Fong, “New Paradigm's in Mediation: Thinking About Our Thinking,” *Mediation Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (Winter 1992): 52.

²¹Meade, *Tell It By Heart*, 243.

²²Donald A. Schon, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1987), 114.

Fourth Healing Power of Story: Activating Long-Term Memory

Story activates long-term memory by engaging imagination, intellect and feeling in a compelling narrative that is both causal and mysterious. This would obviously take some preparation beforehand for the storyteller. The activation of memory would be better experienced through the identification of one's own memory of story. The process may involve acknowledging one's own misinterpretation of events, which would bring a greater sense of integrity to the biblical story.²³

Fifth Healing Power of Story: Teaching to Trust Emotions

Meade recounts the story of Irene, a woman who was brought up to hide her emotions. Irene's mother told her never to raise her voice and that her tears were self-indulgent. Anger was mocked and ridiculed and often resulted in physical punishment. As a result, all her strong emotions were accompanied by large doses of shame and humiliation. To avoid these, she did her best to deny emotions, even to herself. During marriage counseling, Irene was introduced to the story of another, that of the mother and daughter Demeter and Kore. Through a Greek myth, Irene identified with the emotions of rage and loneliness and recognized how her denial of intense emotions had caused depression and added to the frustrations in her marriage.²⁴ Irene's release of emotions and her newly expanded tolerance for emotion transferred back to herself. She then felt more permission to enter realms of deep emotion.

²³Meade, *Tell It By Heart*, 244.

²⁴Meade, *Tell It By Heart*, 244.

Sixth Healing Power of Story: Providing Metaphors for Interpersonal Dynamics

Ernest Kurtz describes stories as the vehicles that move metaphor and image into experience: “Like metaphors and images, stories communicate what is generally invisible and ultimately inexpressible.” Stories allow perceptions and observations to be communicated as facts and reality without the danger of being misunderstood. Stories provide a perspective that connects us to aspects of God, and allows us to see reality as part of its larger whole. Stories make the abstract relatable, illuminate the invisible, give context to metaphors, and color the black or white perspective. Stories are a social framework that touches the human heart.²⁵ This is the substance of biblical storytelling.

Seventh Healing Power of Story: Providing Metaphors for Internal Dynamics

Meade continues Irene’s story by telling how she shifted from blaming others to examining how the hurtful, rejecting voice also came from within. The myth had become more than a metaphor for her life circumstance. By comparing it to her own story it went much deeper.²⁶ Kurtz believes that these kind of stories sustain a “spirituality of imperfection.” Wisdom stories describe what we used to be like, what happened, and what we are like now. Such stories make it possible for other peoples’ stories to become a part of *my* story. Sometimes hearing another’s story can be an occasion for profound change.²⁷

²⁵Ernest Kurtz and Katherine Ketcham, *The Spirituality of Imperfection* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), 16.

²⁶Meade, *Tell It By Heart*, 245.

²⁷Kurtz and Ketcham, *Imperfection*, 64.

Kurtz explains that this format is clear in the tradition of Hasidic Judaism. Rarely do *zadidikim* (teacher who leads an exemplary life) answer questions. Sometimes the rabbi replies with another question; more often he tells a story. And the story, especially as it is told and retold, creates a community of those who are changed by those stories. One need not be Jewish to join that community or to be transformed by that wisdom.²⁸ These dynamics are inherent in the biblical narratives, and in the communication strategies employed by Jesus.

Eighth Healing Power of Story: Internalizing Wise, Helpful, or Comforting Figures

The storytelling process is transformative when stories are told and heard in a non-judgmental environment. Each storyteller is a “witness” to the other’s story. Kurtz defines witness as “one who knows the truth.” In an environment of storytelling and story listening, where each person is at different times both the teller and listener, the hearers do know “the truth” about the tellers in a special way. The hearing that happens when people belong together fashions a narrative home—a place where our anomalies of behavior, our ambivalences of thought and feeling, and the ambiguities of our being all fit in. In such a place we look not for explanations or causes of our behavior. We discover, instead, forgiveness.²⁹ In an environment of trust, storytellers help hearers internalize these healing aspects.

²⁸Kurtz and Ketcham, *Imperfection*, 64.

²⁹Kurtz and Ketcham, *Imperfection*, 115.

Ninth Healing Power of Story: Modeling Alternative Attitudes and Stances that Help People Cope with Hardship and Forge New Paths

Davis emphasizes that the central hinge of any story plot is a crisis—any happening which takes us out of our comfort zone so that we have to adjust to an unfamiliar world. Yet many of the most significant crises in our lives are crises for which we volunteer. Once a crisis is successfully coped with, it is much easier to face it again than deal with change. We then see that repeated patterns, such as addictive behaviors, repeated job changes, or perpetual schooling are crisis patterns that we choose.³⁰ Storytelling enables an exploration of crisis, and provides instruction for stepping into a world of uncertain changes.

Tenth Healing Power of Story: Helping People Come to Terms with Duality, Ambivalence, and Strife, to Move toward a Philosophical Perspective on Life

Taylor reminds us that story is a vessel for carrying meaning. Nothing makes us want to live more than the feeling that we have something important to do. Nothing makes life seem as worthless as the feeling that we do not. Seeing our lives as a story interacting with other stories gives us that sense of being part of a sequence of meaningful events that lead to a significant conclusion. Story gives us a context for coming to terms with that which is otherwise unbearable. It allows us to name and reconcile with that which otherwise presents itself to us as misery, horror, absurdity, or chaos.³¹

³⁰Davis, *Telling*, 8.

³¹Taylor, *Healing Powers*, 58

Taylor writes that many locate the origin of narrative and plot in the very beginnings of human nature; “the daily alternation of day and night, sun and moon, the coming and going and coming again of the seasons; the appearance, disappearance, and then reappearance of migrating animals; even that steady beating in the chest suggested that pattern, rhythm, and sequence were at the core of life.”³² The ability to recognize these patterns, and to pattern one’s own actions after them, increases survival. We live better and longer if we can find a pattern, a plot, to live out in our lives. If we have this sense that our lives have a meaningful plot, we can absorb every kind of tragedy and suffering without despair.

Eleventh Healing Power of Story: Accommodating Manifold Interpretations, Morals and Meanings

Meade suggests that stories can glean meaning for an individual’s experience, yet they can also provide a different experience for another.³³ In biblical storytelling, this process could produce understanding and reconciliation for those whose individual stories overlap with the biblical narratives. Kurtz refers to this process as the “Language of Recovery.” In telling our stories and listening to the stories of others, we actually come to experience the powerful spiritual realities like: Release, Gratitude, Humility, Tolerance, Forgiveness, and Being-at-home. This process does not involve dogma or commandment, or things to be done or truths to be believed. It is not theory, conjecture, argument, analysis, or explanation, but a way of conversation shared by those who accept and identify with their own imperfection. Kurtz implies that: “always truthful to

³²Taylor, *Healing Powers*, 58.

³³Meade, *Tell It By Heart*, 246.

experience, the language of recovery makes it possible to see and understand reality differently.”³⁴

In the context of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, Kurtz explains that the language of recovery worked not because those telling their stories described spiritual realities, but because, in the very telling of their stories they actually experience those realities. AA’s aim is then to convey experience rather than to teach concepts.³⁵ This is also the aim of the biblical storytelling hermeneutic.

Twelfth Healing Power of Story: Applicability to the Collective as well as the Intricately Personal

Kurtz reminds us that in the midst of sorrow and in the presence of joy, both mourners and celebrants tell stories. But especially in times of trouble, when a “miracle” was needed and the limits of human ability were reached, people turned to storytelling as a way of exploring fundamental mysteries: Who are we? Why are we? How are we to live? These most basic questions are spiritual questions, and so the stories that people told concerned spirituality.³⁶ The biblical narratives were told to communities experiencing these same spiritual questions.

³⁴Kurtz and Ketcham, *Imperfection*, 160.

³⁵Kurtz and Ketcham, *Imperfection*, 160.

³⁶Kurtz and Ketcham, *Imperfection*, 7.

Thirteenth Healing Power of Story: Containment of the Sacred,
and Its Conveyance of Ancient Wisdom

Meade determines that whether we're contemplating origin through a creation myth, studying ethics in Bible stories, gleaning psychology from fairy tales, or obtaining the spiritual secrets of sages, one thing is clear: "We're tapping the wisdom of our ancestors. And if you believe as I do, in something called spirit, muse, or inspiration, then you believe that storytelling calls to life some third presence beyond storyteller and listener."³⁷ In the end we cannot fully explain why or how story speaks to the psyche and inspires change. But what we can discern is the generative nature of storytelling.

These thirteen healing powers of story have provided insight for discerning the generative nature of biblical storytelling in a progressive context. These generative processes teach a variety of techniques employed by biblical storytellers. Storytelling teaches listening. It teaches how to interpret our own lives and how to interact with others. Storytelling teaches the meaning of morality, ethics and how to function in society. It can introduce us to the skills that we need to resolve problems and develop relationships. Taylor believes that if we see our lives as stories, rather than as an unrelated series of random events, we have the possibility of having significant, purposeful action in our lives. It is difficult for us to see why anything we are or do is meaningful unless we begin to understand our connectedness to others, to the past, and to the future. That connectedness is primarily the connectedness of story.³⁸

³⁷Meade, *Tell It By Heart*, 247.

³⁸Meade, *Tell It By Heart*, 247.

Applicability to Biblical Storytelling

What better definition is there for a Gospel-telling paradigm? An extensive focus on restoring relationships was discovered in the biblical narratives during the project. If separation is the means by which relationships are broken, then reconnection is the repairing of the brokenness. The project was a workshop for those repairs and the storytelling paradigm, between storyteller and audience and between story listeners, was the medicine. Kurtz asserts that through the practice of hearing and telling stories we discover and slowly learn to use a new map of relating, which flows into developing a sense of how we fit into some meaningful whole. It involves first our relationships and then our identity. We can be redefined by these relationships and our connections to each other.³⁹ The biblical storytelling paradigm emphasizes a process through time and points to the healing of time. By telling of a past at work in the present, that story format affects a kind of re-creation of self by the self. In presenting ourselves as we were, we exercise the right to recover possession of our present-day existence. We do not recall the past for the past; story calls up the past in the present, for the present. Making meaning of the past gives meaning and value to today.⁴⁰

This chapter presented the theoretical foundations of the storytelling process as a mechanism for reinterpreting the biblical narratives with a “meaning as experience” hermeneutic. The chapter then outlined a pedagogy for facilitating this reconnection utilizing the thirteen healing powers of story. These healing powers were engaged when constructing activities of meaning-making for the project participants, which is presented

³⁹Kurtz and Ketcham, *Imperfection*, 115.

⁴⁰Kurtz and Ketcham, *Imperfection*, 151.

in chapter seven. The next chapter presents “transformative learning” as the research methodology for discerning the impact of the biblical storytelling paradigm and process theological reflection on project participants. It attempts to identify what happens when perspectives are transformed by a relational “meaning as experience” paradigm.

CHAPTER SIX

TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING AS RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Transformative Learning Methodology

This chapter details the history and processes of self-directed learning and critical self-reflection, its application for creating and evaluating mechanisms for spiritual growth during the project and its viability for perspective transformation and new meaning-making for participants. Patricia Cranton's book, *Professional Development as Transformative Learning*, provided the primary research methodology for this project.

Cranton's definition of self-direction from P. C. Candy's book, *Self-Direction for Lifelong Learning*, grounds the framework for a transformative learning methodology. Candy writes that the present day embodiment of self-direction is related to current contemporary issues. He identifies these issues as: the ideals of democracy, the ideology of individualism, the concept of egalitarianism, the subjective or relativistic epistemology, the principles of humanistic education, and the construct of adulthood.¹ If we aim to live by these ideals as adult learners then, as Cranton suggests, it will be important for us (the individuals participating in the context of this research) to gain expertise in this theological discipline, initiate and implement innovations in this context, contribute to the church and community, and to be responsible for our own spiritual

¹Patricia Cranton, *Professional Development as Transformative Learning* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1996), 51.

development.² These ideals encapsulated my interest in applying the biblical storytelling paradigm to the post-modern progressive church. This project provided participants in the research with the opportunity to have control over their own learning and access to the resources they might need to engage that learning. Cranton believes that this type of adult learning results in emancipatory and transformative development.

Cranton also cites J. Mezirow's book, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, as being crucial to understanding perspective transformation. Using Mezirow's four dimensions of self-directed learning as her framework, Cranton presents strategies for transformational learning: personal autonomy, self-management, learner control, and autodidaxy (teaching oneself a subject or skill without formal education.)³ It was important that participants have the free will and the freedom to act in their own adult learning process as mentioned by Cranton and described by P. Jarvis in *Paradoxes of Learning: On Becoming an Individual in Society*. Cranton summarizes Jarvis's services model of self-directed learning in which he isolated nine major elements shaping the learners' tendency to be self-directed or other directed.⁴

- disjuncture between past and present experience
- decision to learn
- participation through an educational institution or independently
- aims and objectives determined by learners
- content determined by learners
- method
- communicative interaction
- assessment
- action/outcome

²Cranton, *Transformative Learning*, 51.

³Cranton, *Transformative Learning*, 51.

⁴Cranton, *Transformative Learning*, 55.

These nine elements of self-direction are critical for gaining knowledge that is emancipatory.

Mezirow suggests the following: “Emancipatory knowledge is distinct from the knowledge gained from our ‘technical’ interest in the objective world or ‘practical’ interest in social relationships. Critical self-reflection is appraisive rather than prescriptive or designative.”⁵ J. Dewey defined reflection as: “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusion to which it tends.” Since he was writing this in the context of thinking and problem solving, he considered being able to discriminate between beliefs and evidence to be the central factor in all reflective thinking.⁶ The absence of this discrimination is evident in many processes of biblical interpretation found in the post-modern church, as explained in chapter two.

Cranton suggests that through emancipatory learning (and therefore critical self-reflection) we become aware of constraints of social systems and try to free ourselves from them.⁷ Throughout much of my experience of religious systems, the movement toward critical reflection ultimately resulted in a decision to be freed from these systems. Many of the project participants also shared similar experiences of critical reflection that have led to expulsion and, as a result, freedom from oppressive religious systems.

⁵Cranton, *Transformative Learning*, 75.

⁶Cranton, *Transformative Learning*, 76.

⁷Cranton, *Transformative Learning*, 78.

However, critical *self-reflection* is defined by seven stages of a reflective judgment model offered by P.M. King and K.S. Kitchener in their book, *Developing Reflective Judgment*.

The first three are pre-reflective stages, where individuals do not acknowledge or perhaps even see that knowledge is uncertain, they therefore do not understand that there are problems for which there are no correct answers. The next two stages are termed quasi-reflective. In stage four, there is a recognition that knowledge is uncertain and knowledge claims are idiosyncratic, but no discriminations are made between the quality of individuals' opinions. In stage five, knowledge is seen as subjective because it is an individual's perception. There is a greater awareness of the validity of different perspectives based on evidence.⁸

Cranton identifies King and Kitchener's last two stages of development as reflective thinking. Whereas, knowledge is not a 'given' but must be actively constructed. Any claims of knowledge must be understood in relation to the context in which they were generated. Judgments must be grounded in relevant data and conclusions should remain open to reevaluation.⁹ Ultimately self-reflection is defined as a rational process where beliefs are justified by: the weight of the evidence, the explanatory value of the interpretations, the risk of erroneous conclusions, consequences of alternative judgment, and the interrelationship of these factors.¹⁰ While critical self-reflection is the central process in transformative learning, it does not always lead to transformation. "To be transformative," Cranton suggests, "self-reflection has to involve and lead to some fundamental change in perspective."¹¹

⁸Cranton, *Transformative Learning*, 79.

⁹Cranton, *Transformative Learning*, 79.

¹⁰Cranton, *Transformative Learning*, 79.

¹¹Cranton, *Transformative Learning*, 80.

Fostering critical self-reflection within the project was vital for participants to gain emancipatory knowledge leading to transformative learning. Cranton suggests: “it is only when a revision of basic assumptions, beliefs, or a perspective on education takes place that a transformation has occurred.”¹² Perspective transformation includes the examination of the content of our experiences and questioning why we are questioning. Cranton identified that transformative learning exists when the adult learner realizes a foundational knowledge of self that she defines as: “the capacity to fully and freely participate in rational dialogue, to achieve a broader, more discriminating, permeable and integrative understanding of his/her experience as a guide to action.”¹³ The absence of self-directed learning within many religious education settings is a core problem that this research addressed. The creation of spiritual formation mechanisms that result in this kind of transformative learning was a comprehensive task that involved more time, energy, and resources than first imagined.

Project Design

Exploring the integration of process thought, biblical storytelling and emergent worship in this project was important for evaluating the evidence of transformative learning and new meaning-making for participants. Many members of the congregation at HCC are pilgrims in exile—moving through experiences of faith that have caused them to embody the doubter, the agnostic, the Gnostic, and the spiritual traveler. It was my expectation that this new biblical storytelling paradigm could resolve the problem

¹²Cranton, *Transformative Learning*, 113.

¹³Cranton, *Transformative Learning*, 117.

addressed in the project: the need for “a new way of seeing that welcomed the Bible as a sacred conversation partner, and restore its authority grounded, not in God, but in the community’s sacred trust” (see page 1 of this document). The project led the congregation of HCC into an exploration of biblical storytelling that yielded opportunities for engaging the sacred biblical stories and reclaiming the Bible as a partner for spiritual formation.

In response to this project proposal Pastor Mike suggested the church could launch three different worship services to run simultaneously. Pastor Mike and the leadership team discerned that the format of the traditional service was not meeting the needs of the diverse congregation. Since the merger of C4 and Oak Creek United Church of Christ, issues around worship style and the integration of contemporary music into the traditional worship structure were hotly debated. A comprehensive worship survey was presented to the congregation to solicit these concerns. From those findings the need to provide several worship services that engaged the diverse elements of the congregation was identified. Two new services were launched beginning with the first Sunday of Lent in 2014. The three worship services were described as Sanctuary, Symposium (the doctoral research project), and Salon. These new worship offerings were advertised through a 60,000-piece direct mail marketing campaign to surrounding neighborhoods and communities.

The Sanctuary service was promoted as a traditional worship opportunity led by Senior Pastor Mike Castle. The term “sanctuary” comes from the Latin *sanctuarium*, “a place for holy things and holy people to gather.” Worship in this holy place seeks to maintain faithfulness to the historic tradition yet provide a context of search for greater

relevance through contemporary expressions of the arts and music. This worship experience is most relevant for worshippers from a traditional experience of the organ, hymnody, classic liturgy and their contemporary expressions.

An alternative worship service titled Symposium was created and implemented with the intent to offer a more contemporary worship opportunity and gather data for this doctoral project. Symposium, with its roots in the ancient Greek symposium as a key social institution, literally means “drinking party” that became a forum for communities to debate topics, explore experiences, testify, and simply to celebrate with others. Worship in this context integrated the practice of faith formation with engagement of a laid back coffee house atmosphere. This format used the biblical storytelling paradigm designed to speak to the unique experiences of the digital generation, including millennials and genXers, who are looking for ways to participate and contribute to corporate worship.

The third service launched simultaneously was led by the associate pastor, Rev. Ruth Hopkins, and was based on the gathering of people under the same roof of an inspiring host, called the “Salon.” It was born in 16th century Italy and flourished in 18-19th century France. It was held partly to amuse one another and partly to refine the taste and increase the knowledge of the participants through conversation. Worship in a salon format provides opportunity for conversation to occur without restrictions of faith, theology, or practice of religion imposed upon participants. It was created for those who self-identify as “spiritual but not religious.”

The “Emergent Worship” Paradigm

“Emergent worship” was engaged for Symposium as an alternative to the typical contemporary worship model. Contemporary worship posed challenges for the context and participants; including the dominance of non-inclusive language, reliance on a band of skilled musicians and vocalists and emphasis on conservative theology. Rather, emergent worship is frequently grounded in ancient worship practices. Some of the insights that have been rediscovered by the emerging church movement are:

- “One size fits all” worship patterns are frequently not suitable for the particular needs of local congregations.
- Worship design must consider the social and cultural context of the participants.
- Meaningful worship can be effectively planned by the worshippers themselves.
- Ancient worship practices such as contemplative prayer, meditation, simplicity, and silence frequently lead to profound encounters with God.

These insights offered an opportunity for spiritual renewal that focused on the spiritual needs of the congregation in their own context. It proposed that worship is participatory and not a spectator sport. The participation of the congregation in worship models their partnership with God in the work of God’s domain: we offer ourselves to God, we communicate with God by both speaking and listening, and we then respond to God’s grace through our actions.

The “emergent church” is a postmodern movement skeptical of the claim that “one size fits all,” especially as it pertains to current praxis in local Protestant congregations. Emergent worship is a highly contextual experience that assumes a variety of shapes that vary with each congregation. It reclaims the rich tradition of ancient worship practices that move beyond an emphasis on prescribed form to that of

encountering God during the worship experience. Emergent worship is a contextual experience, designed within the context of a congregation with a particular history, at a particular time, and in a particular geographic area. Emergent worship experiences cannot be imposed “from the top down,” but must be allowed to flow from the worshippers “from the ground up.” The model is that of participation by all the believers who are worshipping in a particular time and place. In current praxis, however, this situation is rarely realized. Whether worship is understood to be “traditional” or “contemporary,” one leader (or a leadership team) makes all of the decisions that guide the worshipping body, as well as supplying the personnel who lead the worship experience. The emergent worship movement reverses that trend by encouraging both worship leadership and participation by a much wider representation of the Body of Christ.

Varieties of resources have appeared in recent years that attempt to explain the emergent church movement. Some, such as *Christianity for the Rest of Us* by Diana Butler Bass, concentrate on the principles that guide the emergent church movement, such as hospitality, discernment, diversity, contemplation, and justice. Other books like LaMar Boschman’s *Future Worship* take a historical approach and identify the emerging church as part of a natural social progression: first from the spoken to the printed word; then to a broadcast media-influenced worship in which the worshipper is a spectator; and finally to the emergent understanding of worship as contextual and highly interactive. Brian McLaren’s *Finding Our Way Again: The Return of the Ancient Practices* provided an introduction to ancient worship practices such as contemplation, hospitality and fasting that have been largely ignored by current praxis. Phyllis Tickle’s *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and Why* is an examination of the Emergent

Church as the most recent of the theological transformations that the Christian church has undergone about every 500 years.

Symposium worship, as an emergent worship model, was designed to address the connections between living in exile and embracing the power of biblical narratives to tell our own stories of restoration and healing. Participants were encouraged to investigate, observe and study biblical stories of justice, healing and restoration, and engage in experiential responses. Stories were chosen each week to practice, learn, and perform in Sunday worship services. Participants engaged in diverse story-learning methods and models as a means of internalizing or embodying stories for performance by heart. A performance criticism methodology was employed to discern the ancient audience's authentic experience of the stories, elicit personal life connections to stories, and learn biblical stories by heart.

Basic components of the emergent biblical storytelling worship service included:

1. Call to Worship—Introducing a theological metaphor for the worship service and illustrating that metaphor with images, displays, props and video clips
GOAL: Ground the theological metaphor in a contemporary context
2. Experience the story—hearing the story told by the storyteller
GOAL: Ground the worship in the experience of the biblical story
3. Exploring the story in its original context—learning about key words and concepts in order to recognize how the story would have been understood by audiences to whom it was first told
GOAL: Identify the original experience of the story for the ancient audience
4. Reflect on the story—describe the field of experience of the story, relating dynamics of the story to one's own lived experience through small group discussion, etc.
GOAL: Re-contextualizing memory (transform) in order to connect individual subjective experience to the story
5. Connect to the story—communicating through voice, gesture or writing down the learnings of the story to each other with emotional impact

GOAL: Drawing together all the emotions out of yourself and use this emotional experience of the story to make it alive for others

6. Engaging with the story—participation in reflective activities and spiritual disciplines to personalize the new experience

GOAL: allowing the meaning of the story to be a conduit of relationship between God and people, and between each other

7. Celebrating the story—practice the emotional connection through communion, stewardship, group activity, music, dance, art, etc.

GOAL: Send the congregation out to practice the telling of the story in the world

Six emergent worship services were designed for the project spanning the five Sundays of Lent and the first Sunday after Easter (see Appendices A and B on DVD). The biblical stories in the Gospel lectionary texts were used for storytelling on each of these Sundays. The multi-media resource *Lumicon*, developed by Dr. Thomas and Amelia Boomershine, was utilized for identifying: contemporary metaphors, themes for discussion, music suggestions, movie clip ideas, integration of components and scripture commentary. The Boomershines' website, www.GoTell.org, was also used to study a performance criticism hermeneutic for exploring the biblical stories in their original context. Additionally, resources for developing self-reflection and spiritual formation activities and ideas were gathered from www.Pinterest.com and the UCC's *Seasons of the Spirit* adult Christian education curriculum (see Appendix C on DVD).

Summary of Data Collection Methods

A phenomenological methodology (the different ways in which people experience something or think about something) was primarily engaged for the collection of qualitative data through: interviews, observing responses of workshop participants,

engaging focus groups around processing story impact, analyzing data for significant statements of experiential learning, and utilizing the arts to describe the essence of the experience. Narrative inquiry was also employed with the use of stories, autobiography, journals, field notes, letters, conversations, interviews, family stories, photos (and other artifacts), and life experience, as the units of analysis to research and understand the way people create meaning in their lives as narratives. Ethnology was also engaged (a comparison of the characteristics of different peoples and the relationship between them) to solicit experiences of transformative learning and the development of a community of meaning from the following data collection methods:

- Pre and post surveys (via questionnaires, Facebook postings, twitter posts)
- Interviews (with individuals and groups)
- Observing/recording responses of participants in small groups through table facilitators
- Facebook focus groups for processing story impact
- Utilizing the arts to describe the experience (drawing, painting, music, poetry, dance, etc.)
- Visualization exercises, prayer stations, futures invention process, etc.

The adoption of critical self-reflection as the central process in transformative learning was intentional. As Cranton suggested: “to be transformative, reflection has to involve and lead to some fundamental change in perspective.”¹⁴ This process was observed at work in the spiritual development of project participants, particularly as it related to biblical interpretation of moral issues being addressed in social and political structures. Techniques recommended by Cranton for helping others examine their assumptions held promise for helping learners engage in critical self-reflection. These techniques, suggested in S. Brookfield’s article, “Developing Critical Thinkers:

¹⁴Cranton, *Transformative Learning*, 80.

Challenging Adults to Explore Alternative Ways of Thinking and Acting,” included: critical questioning, critical-incident exercises, critical analysis, role-play and critical debate, and crisis-decision simulations.¹⁵

Data triangulation (the use of two or more methods of analysis to confirm results) was also utilized to validate qualitative data collected through surveys, interviews and observations of responses to reflective exercises. The project triangulated this data by comparing these observations through the lenses of gender, denominational affiliation, and generational demographics. MaxQDA, a comprehensive data analysis software tool, was used to examine and manage qualitative and mixed methods data analysis by processes like coding and retrieval. It was also highly productive for including variables and quantifying the results of this qualitative analysis (www.maxqda.com). This tool was extremely beneficial for reporting this data, generating grounded theory and organizing the findings.

Additionally, alternative criteria for judging this qualitative research included:

- Credibility – participants will judge the credibility of the results.
- Transferability – the degree to which the results of the research can be generalized or transferred to other contexts of settings.
- Dependability – emphasizing the need for the researcher to account for the ever-changing context, and describing the changes that occur in the setting and how these changes affected the way the researcher approached the study.
- Confirmability – the degree to which the results could be confirmed or corroborated by others.

¹⁵Cranton, *Transformative Learning*, 83.

Adaptation of Transformative Learning for Data Analysis

The following reporting structures were used to engage narrative, phenomenological, and ethnographical methodologies of data analysis:

- Restatements of problems, questions in the research
- Record stories used to describe transformation
- Identify instances when individuals theorize about their lives
- Identify narrative segments
- Identify patterns of meaning (events, processes, epiphanies, themes)
- Significant statements
- Meaning of statements
- Themes of meanings
- Exhaustive description of phenomenon
- Descriptions of culture
- Analysis of cultural themes
- Interpretation of process, lessons learned, questions raised

These reporting structures are similar to what Mezirow meant by a “meaning perspective.”¹⁶ He described it as a filter, framework, or paradigm that shapes our perceptions of ourselves, others, and our surroundings. They are formed through experiences. Past experiences will shape the way one assimilates new experiences. These strategies also help to identify distortions in other meaning perspectives.¹⁷ Cranton references Mezirow’s definition of a distorted assumption or premise as: “one that leads the learner to view reality in a way that arbitrarily limits what is included, impedes differentiation, lacks permeability or openness to other ways of seeing, or does not facilitate an integration of experience.”¹⁸ These are perspectives of adults that have not

¹⁶Cranton, *Transformative Learning*, 91-92.

¹⁷Cranton, *Transformative Learning*, 96.

¹⁸Cranton, *Transformative Learning*, 103.

been fully developed. Identifying these perspectives within my own development as an adult learner provided substance for project consideration.

Additionally, Cranton's emphasis on sociocultural context being significant in shaping our perspectives provided another layer for collecting data in the project. She cites P. Jarvis's suggestion that when people develop, they "began to act back on the social world that has formed them." Learning is, in Jarvis' view: a "process of conforming to the social world and one of generating social change."¹⁹ The evolution from transformative learner to transformative educator requires an embrace of Jarvis' understanding: "self-directed learning is a teaching technique rather than a learning strategy."²⁰ Cranton further suggests: "it is only when a revision of basic assumptions, beliefs, or a perspective takes place that a transformation has occurred."²¹ Perspective transformation includes the examination of the content of our experiences and questioning why we are questioning. Mezirow suggests that evidence of a transformative learning exists when the adult learner realizes his/her "capacity to fully and freely participate in rational dialogue, to achieve a broader, more discriminating, permeable and integrative understanding of his/her experience as a guide to action."²² The creation of spiritual formation mechanisms that resulted in this kind of transformative learning was an exciting and energetic task.

This chapter offered transformative learning as the research methodology for the project and identified the process of perspective transformation from a relational

¹⁹Cranton, *Transformative Learning*, 104.

²⁰Cranton, *Transformative Learning*, 110.

²¹Cranton, *Transformative Learning*, 113.

²²Cranton, *Transformative Learning*, 117.

paradigm. The chapter detailed the history and processes of self-directed learning and critical self-reflection, its application for creating and evaluating mechanisms for spiritual growth during the project, and its viability for perspective transformation and new meaning-making for participants. An explanation of the project model defined emergent worship as the environment for engaging transformational learning in the progressive context. The chapter concluded with a summary of these methods used for data collection and data analysis.

Chapter seven presents the data collected during the field experience of the project. This chapter records reflections about what happened during the implementation of the project, followed by the results of exploring new paradigms of biblical authority for progressive Christians in the design, implementation and evaluation of an emergent worship experience that was grounded in the biblical storytelling hermeneutic of performance criticism. The chapter outlines the project's collection of data, the analysis of that data, and initial outcomes. Results of surveys, interviews, responses to reflective activities, and phenomenological observations are included.

CHAPTER SEVEN

FIELD EXPERIENCE

Prior to beginning this project it was suggested that engaging a conservative paradigm of “biblical authority” to discern spiritual formation and growth would confuse or manipulate participants into responding to this new hermeneutical paradigm from a perspective incongruent with their progressive theological foundation. Rather, it was suggested to ground the research from a new perspective: the authority of the story grounded in our experience of God, which could explore and validate the biblical storytelling paradigm without trappings of a traditional spiritual formation methodology.

With these suggestions, a new project focus evolved to explore new paradigms of biblical authority for progressive Christians by designing, implementing and evaluating an emerging worship experience grounded in a biblical storytelling hermeneutic of performance criticism. The project’s success would be assessed by illuminating the connections between peoples’ life experience and biblical stories of restoration and healing, and then calling the community to social action. Would the project generate new movements with the congregation? Will an emergent worship model inspire connection and help people experience a transcendence of God? Does the model honor the piety of believers, yet stretch participants to stay present in the new experience? At the core of these questions lay the project’s possibility for a transformative purpose: can a

consciously structured worship experience of biblical storytelling be a generative model for the progressive and/or emergent church in a post-modern digital culture?

Summary of the Model Implementation

As worship services were planned for implementation, a group of participants called facilitators were invited to identify and evaluate questions for conversation during the small group table discussions, and then facilitate these discussions at each table. Ten facilitators accepted the invitation, reviewed the worship themes and offered their observations. The complexities of a progressive theology immediately became clear when one facilitator voiced concerns over the language of the proposed table discussion questions for the second worship service (see Appendix B on DVD). The following email exchange provides a clearer understanding of the facilitator's concerns, and illustrates how we reached resolution. Linda requested that I use her real name in this paper.

Linda,

Thank you so much for your help this morning, and your suggestions for improving the service. As we discussed, see attached liturgy for the service next Sunday. I am eager to hear your feedback and advice for making these discussions and prayer activities as accessible as possible to all people! Let me know what you think!

Hi Brice,

It would help me to know what you are going to say in your interpretation of the scripture. I notice your focus is on judgment. For me, the focus in this scripture is being born of the Spirit. A problem I have with the church is all the focus on sin and judgment. I do not find that a motivator to grow spiritually. I find it generating shame and guilt. I like to encourage people to wrestle with their growing edges by starting with a vision of where their next step on the journey is, knowing that God has called them for their own very special unique purpose. Then get into the things that hold us back and encourage them to look at how to move beyond those things and have the courage to grow into their purpose. That

is what is meaningful to me. So, I am having a hard time understanding your focus on the temptation part of it.

I notice your last question is on grace and yet that word does not appear in the scripture. I am curious about why there seems to be no emphasis in your liturgy about being born of the Spirit. And I hope you are going to give at least 15 minutes instead of 12 to the table groups. Even that is short. People have difficulty opening up. These topics make us vulnerable. The leader has to be the first one to share. Once his/her vulnerability is out on the table, it makes it easier for the others . . . especially if they have not had a lot of experience with this. Also, it's best to start with a more shallow question and then move to deeper ones. The women at my table looked at me with a deer in headlight expression with the question on temptation. They found my handout helpful to see how they are tempted and then were able to name some ways. I think people without a theological education have difficulty with these terms. They've often heard them with some very shaming and guilt-producing environments. I know that's not what you intend, but I think we've got to find a way to get the message of love out and how we are encouraged to grow into our capacity to love instead of guilting people for falling short . . . especially in a 10-12 minute time slot. I hear Mike preaching of God's extravagant love, but often the words in the scripture give a different message. I think we have to work hard to help people hear those things differently.

I also have difficulty with the discussion questions . . . learned this in my training as an Imago Relationship Therapist. When a question is asked, we move to our heads. I would hope you want your table groups to be conversing at the level of the heart. If so, we found that sentence stems worked much better than question. I'll paste your questions below & then show in italics how I'd change them to make them sentence stems.

1. In what ways have you been judged by others? How do you usually react to these judgments?

Ways that I've been judged by others include . . . The way I react when I am judged in these ways is . . .

2. How have you judged other people? How do they react when you are judgmental?

The ways I judge others include . . . The way I see them react is . . .

3. What can you do to look at others from a place of grace? What are some insights from our biblical story concerning this?

What I can do to look at others from a place of grace is . . . The insights I see in our biblical story that touch me are . . .

I realize the "that touch me" is my language, but I see it moving in the direction of heart instead of head. If I were going to be a table facilitator, using your format,

I'd probably develop a handout on grace and being born of the Spirit and come up with questions in that vein as I did yesterday. I have a hard time with your questions, and I've studied theology. Hope this is helpful. If you send me your barista message, I may have more suggestions. Also, if you could send me the words to the closing prayer yesterday, I'd like to read them. I was confused about some of it and will probably be asking you for some clarification.

Linda,

These are great reflections! Thanks for again pushing the edges of my own connection to the biblical story. I often go first to the head stuff . . . and this research is really about looking for ways to encourage the "learning by heart" connection. I wish I had more time to just live with the stories . . . but having to pull all other aspects of the service together, in addition to setting up space and getting the PowerPoint to interact, on top of my full time job has been overwhelming. But I will take more time to do this before next week. Thanks for helping me do some of the needed "processing time" to assess this project.

I have been using commentary written by my DMin mentor for reflecting on these services. His commentary is more of an experiential exegesis (how the stories were experienced by the original audience) than the traditional source criticism. I tend to use these as jumping off points, and have not really scripted anything out. I wanted my exegesis to be experienced as conversational. You can read Dr. Boomershine's commentaries at www.gotell.org.

Having thought through your assessment of the table discussions, I've rewritten the questions in this way. Let me know if you think these could use some tweaking:

1. The terms being 'born again' . . . or 'born from above' means . . .
2. I recognize that when I "point my finger" at others, I am responding from a place of . . .
3. Responding to others from a spiritual place means . . .

I will be doing this first Lenten worship service again on Wednesday at the seminary for chapel, so I am excited about making these changes to the service. Thanks again for your thoughtful feedback!

Brice,

I checked out Tom's commentary. The last paragraph is the most powerful for me. I have difficulty seeing the playful, conciliatory, humble, etc./love for Nicodemus side of Jesus in your questions/sentence stems. That is more what I'd want to flesh out . . . the promise side of it vs the finger pointing . . . judgmental side of it. But that's me. If you want, I can ponder it some more.

Linda,

Okay, I still am not sure what you want then. Can you rewrite the questions in the

way it seems appropriate? Maybe if I can get a sense of what you mean by writing these questions yourself, it'll be clearer to me. Can you also help me write the discussion questions for the other services? I think this is a fun exercise!

Hi Brice,

Below are some of my comments . . . please know, this is where I am coming from spiritually and feel free to take what you like and leave the rest. I have my comments first followed by your sentence stem.

I am not sure why you want them to respond to this. It's like a test at school . . . keeps you in your head. You're getting a doctorate, so you probably have to spend a lot of time there. I have not found head stuff as helpful as experience. To me, experience adds depth.

I'd probably use something like: My experience being "born again," "born from above," or **born of the spirit** is . . . (bolded because it's my favorite of the Trinity). I am more closely aligned with the Holy Spirit. Love her.

The terms being 'born again' . . . or 'born from above' means . . .

I know your theme is about pointing a finger but it does not inspire me to grow spiritually . . . finding the guilty part of myself that points fingers. I'd leave the service feeling guilty rather than inspired by love and grace. And again, it sounds like a test. I'd probably use something like: What comes to me when I consider the difference between finger pointing and extending the love of God, I . . .

I recognize that when I "point my finger" at others, I am responding from a place of...

This assumes there is only one way to respond from a spiritual place. You might add "For me responding from a spiritual place means . . ."

Responding to others from a spiritual place means . . .

Hope this helps. Let me know what you think. Glad you're having fun!!

Good morning, Brice,

You got me up early this morning. This came to me in my sleep and when I woke up with it, I could not go back to sleep until I got it sent to you. I think you could use the same sentence stems every week or make the last one specific to the scripture for that day:

1. The new awareness I received about the scripture lesson this morning is . . .
2. What that means to me personally is . . .
3. In the light of that new learning, the change I am being called to make is . . .

OR specifically with this scripture:

In the light of Jesus' teaching about the difference between finger pointing and being born of the spirit, the change I am being called to make is . . .

Now, I hope to go back to sleep for at least an hour.
Linda

This ended our exchange, and although it took careful thought and openness to the conversation, the experience of relationship building that occurred as a result provided new insight which was productive for the evolution of the project. I also asked facilitators to complete a survey of their experience of the table discussions after during each worship service (see Appendix D on DVD). The video resource included (see Appendix G on DVD) illustrates the content and structure of the emergent worship service. However, I will explain the process as it occurred.

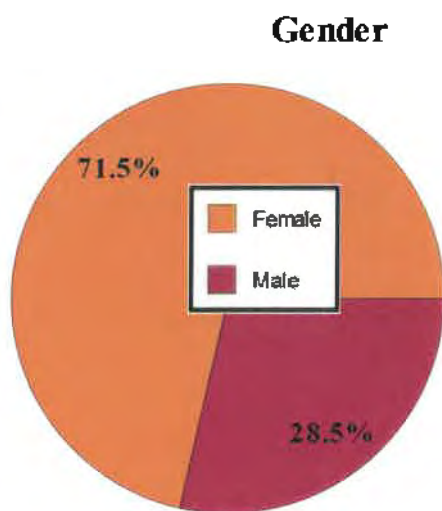
After meeting with the pastor to choose the lectionary texts for the traditional service, I investigated digital media resources for exploring a theological metaphor and identifying creative elements of the service that could relate to the worship theme. I then created a overall structure of the service, and sent these ideas to musicians, table facilitators, artistic and environment coordinator and digital communications support. After identifying the necessary elements for the service, these elements were then incorporated into a worship schedule (see Appendix A on DVD). Music rehearsals were held an hour before the service, and PowerPoint and other digital media resources were put into place by the Saturday before service (see Appendix F on DVD). Additionally a crew assisted in setting up the environment for the service on each Saturday before service, including: tables, interactive resources, a metaphor display, instrumentation, audio and video equipment. The evenings prior to worship were spent learning the

biblical narrative by heart, and reviewing performance criticism commentary. Both of these efforts took significant amount of time for preparation.

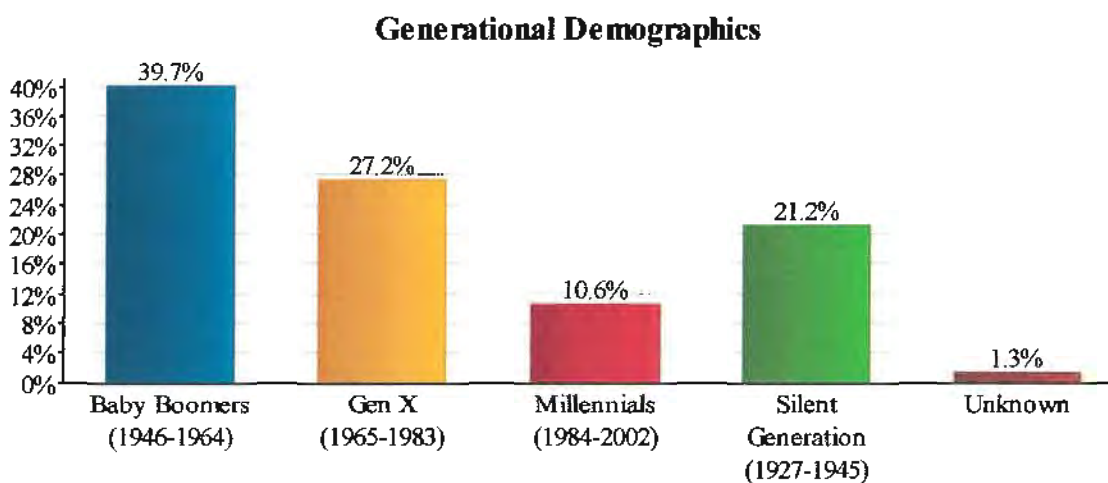
Demographics of Overall Participants

151 participants were involved in the collection of data for this doctoral project and they were divided into two groups. The first group were members and nonmember participants of Harmony Creek Church. The second group were seminary students attending United Theological Seminary. The second group was included in the collection of data for providing a baseline of students in pursuit of theological degrees in order to triangulate data collected in the first group. This baseline of participants sought to identify an orthodox theology. Triangulating the data by using the same or similar questions and identical collection methods compared an orthodox perspective with a

progressive theology. The differences and similarities were utilized so that the progressive data could be contextualized. The data collected from these two perspectives are presented individually, with comparative analysis provided afterward. Methods of data collection included surveys, interviews and detailed evaluations. In this overall sampling of participants, 72% were female and 29% were male (Figure 1).



All Participants
Figure 1

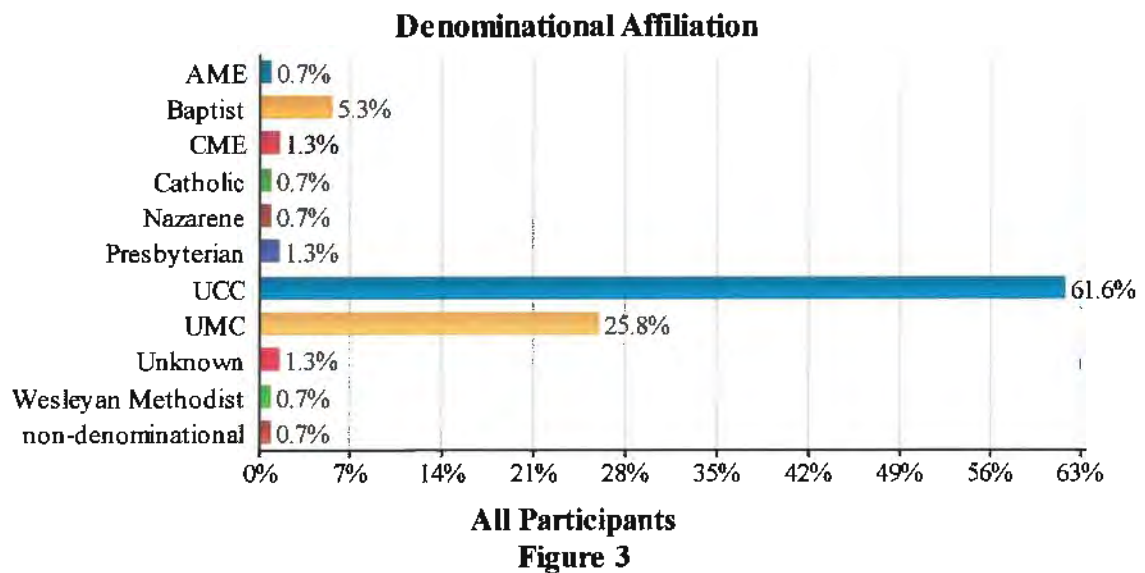


**All Participants
Figure 2**

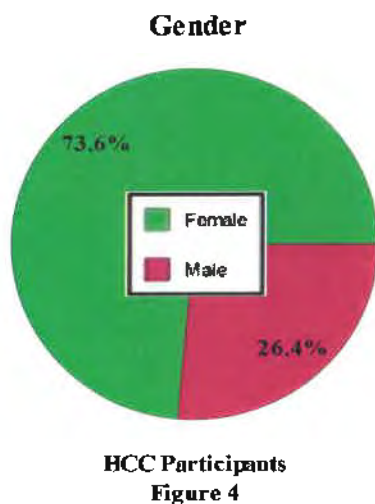
Almost 40% of participants surveyed identified as Baby Boomers, born between 1945 and 1964. A little over 27% of participants self identified as Gen Xers, with birthdates between 1965 and 1983. About 11% of participants, born between the years of 1984 and 2002, are referred to as Millennials. And just a little over 21% is of total participants surveyed were from the Silent Generation, born between the years of 1927 and 1945. Demographic information for 1.3% of participants is unknown (Figure 2).

Denominational Affiliation of Overall Participants

Almost 62% of participants were affiliated with the United Church of Christ, with about 26% affiliated with the United Methodist Church. The next largest group was Baptist at 5.3%, with smaller percentages coming from the Presbyterian, AME, CME, Catholic, Nazarene, and nondenominational (Figure 3).



Data Analysis of Harmony Creek Church Participants

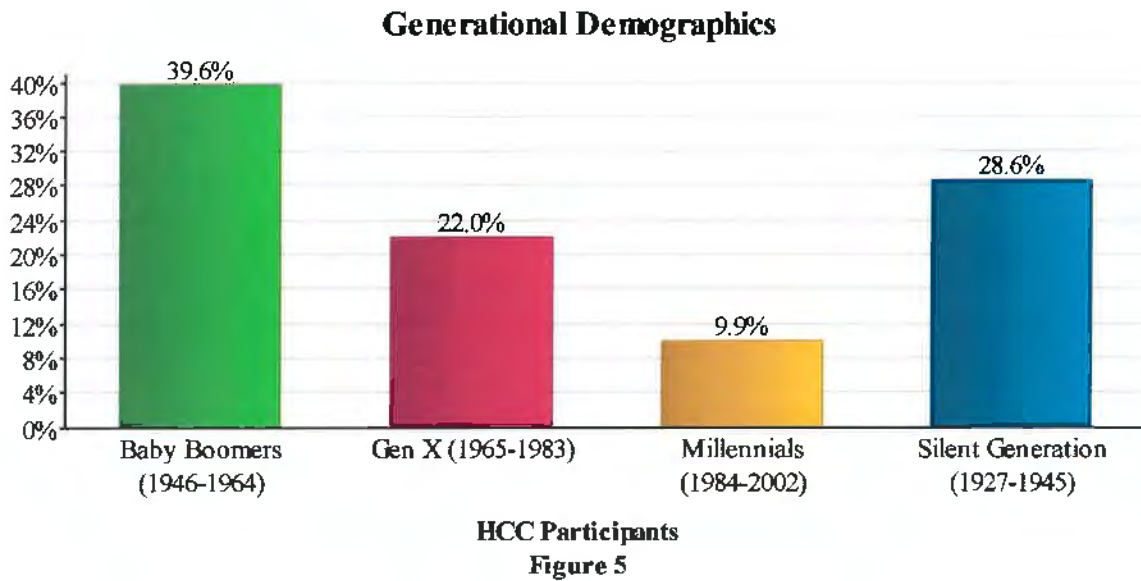


In the sampling of ninety-one Harmony Creek Church (HCC) participants, 74% were female and 26% were male (Figure 4).

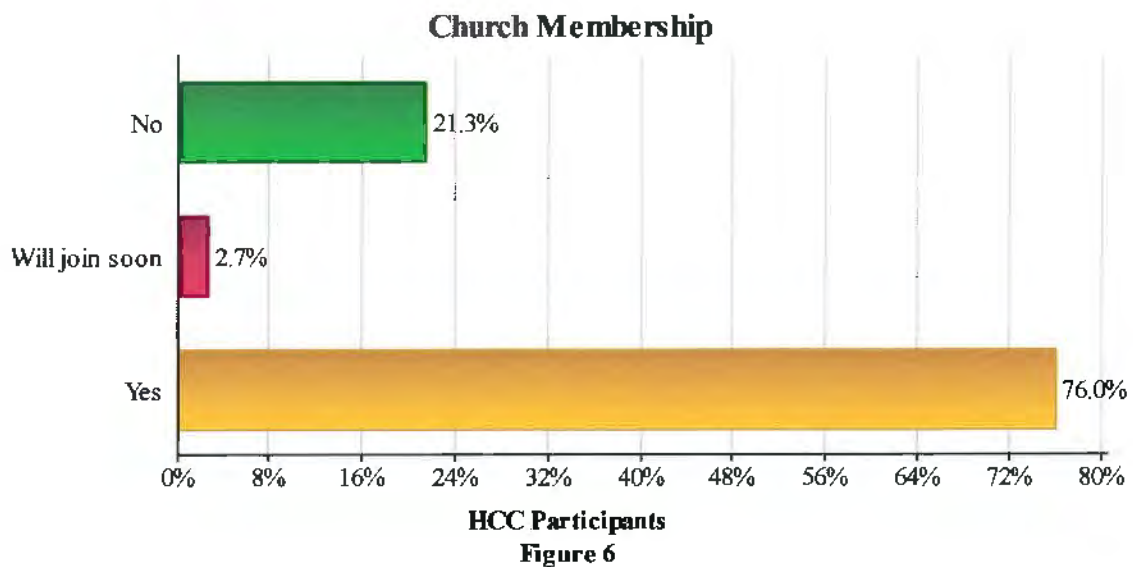
36% of HCC participants surveyed identified as Baby Boomers, born between 1945 and 1964.

Roughly 23% of participants self identified as Gen Xers, with birthdates between 1965 and 1983. About 9% of surveyed participants, born between the years

of 1984 and 2002, are referred to as Millennials. And just a little over 32% of participants surveyed were from the Silent Generation, born between the years of 1927 and 1945 (Figure 5).



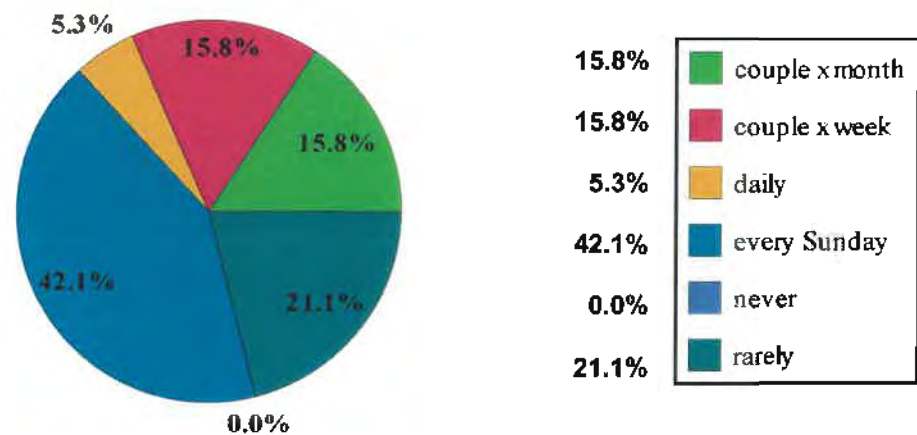
While all participants belonged to the United Church of Christ, 76% identified as members of Harmony Creek Church. 21% said they were not members, and 3% said there were not members, but were planning to join soon (Figure 6).



Frequency of Reading Scripture

HCC respondents were asked about their frequency of reading Scripture prior to their experience of biblical storytelling in worship. 42% of respondents identified reading Scripture only on Sundays when printed in the bulletin. 21% identified rarely reading Scripture. 16% identified reading Scripture couple times a month as well as 16% reading Scripture couple times a week. Only 5% of respondents identified reading Scripture on a daily basis yet 0% mentioned never reading Scripture at all (Figure 7).

Read scripture prior to Biblical Storytelling

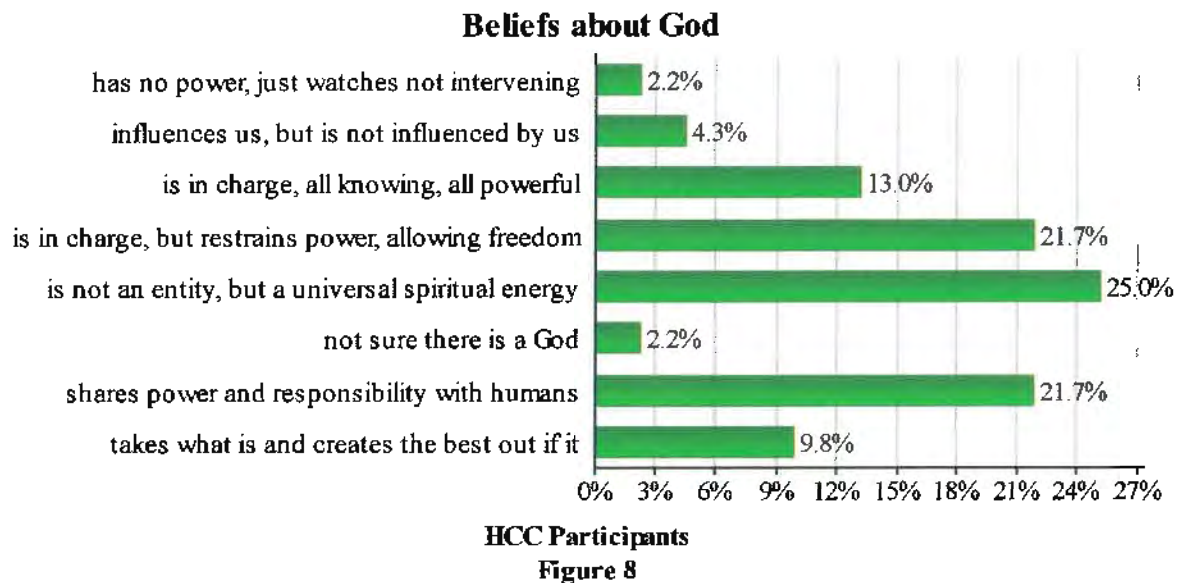


**HCC Participants
Figure 7**

Beliefs about God

A total of 75 HCC participants were also surveyed about their understanding of God. About 25% of respondents understood that God is not an entity, but a universal spiritual energy. Over 21% of respondents believed that God is in charge, but restrains power, allowing freedom of choice. The same amount of respondents identified God as sharing power and responsibility with humans. Additionally, almost 10% of respondents suggested that God takes what is and creates the best out of it. Only 13% of respondents

believed that God is completely in charge, all-knowing, all-powerful. 4% believed that God influences us, but is not influenced by us. 2% of respondents believe that God has no power, and just watches but not intervening. 2% said they were not sure there is a God (Figure 8).

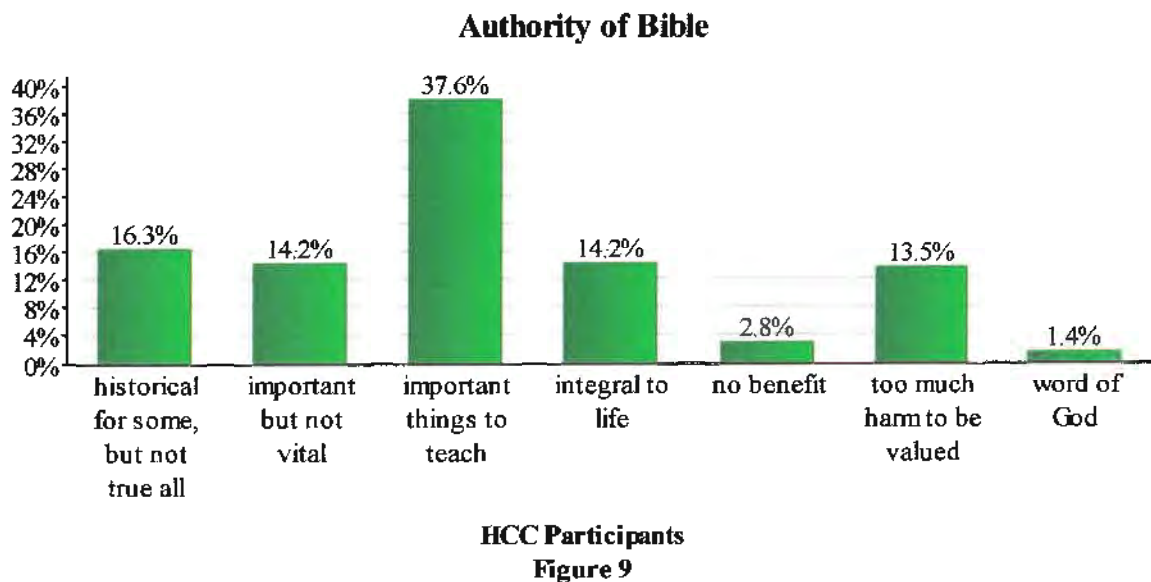


One write-in description of God was also very informative, and perhaps representative of the majority beliefs about God in this progressive context: God is love and we find God there.

Authority of the Bible in Spiritual Life

HCC respondents were also given the opportunity to identify the Bible's authority in their spiritual lives. This was perhaps the most intriguing data collected in the research surveys. Over 36% of respondents said that the Bible has important things to teach. Less than 14% said the Bible is integral to their life, and another 14% believe it is important but not vital. 13% of respondents identified that the Bible has caused too much harm to be valued. While 10% of respondents suggested that the Bible is a historical testament of

God to some, but is not relevant for everyone. Less than 3% feel the Bible is of no benefit at all. 1.4% believe the Bible is the inerrant word of God (Figure 9).



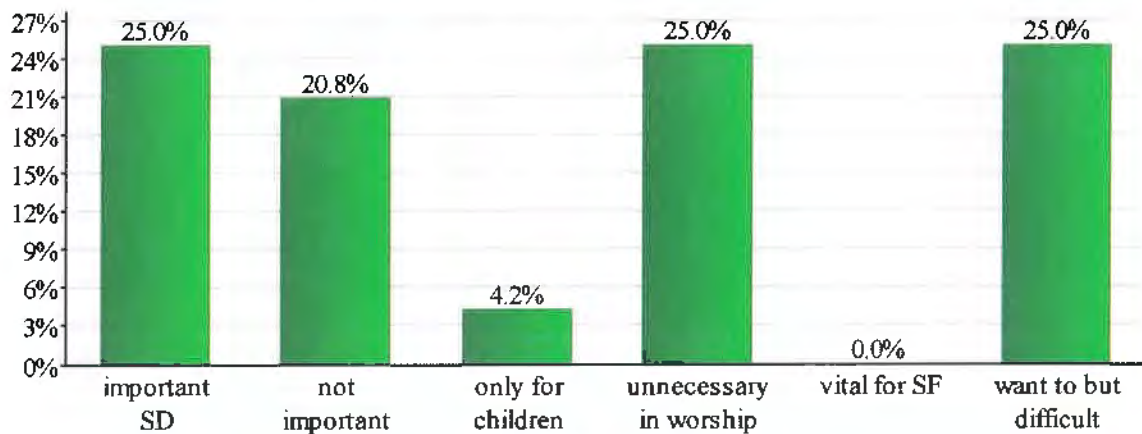
Additional comments by HCC members included:

- People's use of the Bible has sometimes caused harm—sometimes good. It can be relevant if understood in context.
- Reading and interpreting the Bible increases thought, emotion, and spirit.
- It is often used for the wrong reason.
- Some Bible stories are valuable starting places for discussion, but there are other things that accomplish that as well -- personal life experiences.
- The Bible is integral to living my life. The interpretation of the Bible, like the world, evolves.

View of Biblical Storytelling Prior to Experience

HCC participants were asked for their perception of biblical storytelling prior to experiencing it in worship. 23% believed that it was unnecessary in worship. 23% suggested it was an important spiritual discipline. 23% also suggested they would like to do it but felt it would be difficult for them. 19% felt biblical storytelling was not important at all. Less than 4% suggested it was only for children (Figure 10).

View of Biblical Storytelling prior to service



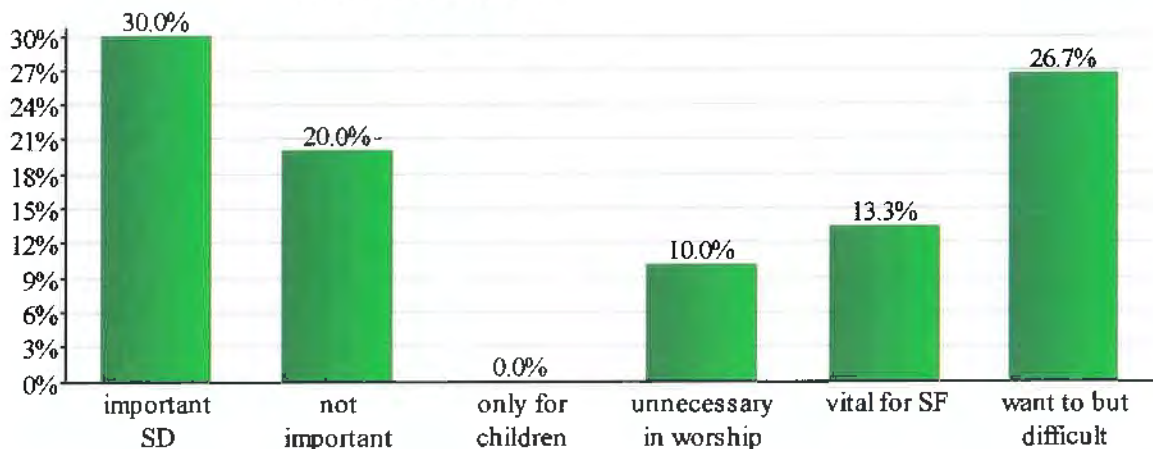
HCC Participants

Figure 10

View of Biblical Storytelling After the Experience

After experiencing biblical storytelling in worship 31% of HCC respondents believed it was an important spiritual discipline. 28% suggested they would like to but still thought it would be difficult. 21% maintained that it was still not important. However 10% felt that it could be vital for spiritual formation while another 10% felt it was still unnecessary and worship. No one suggested that it was only for children (Figure 11).

View of Biblical Storytelling after service



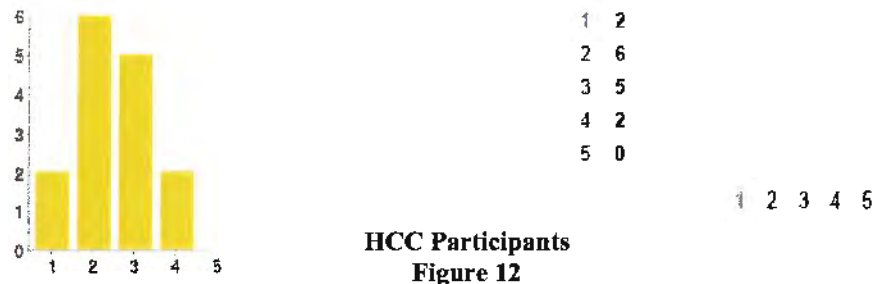
HCC Participants

Figure 11

Recalling Sacred Stories After the Experience

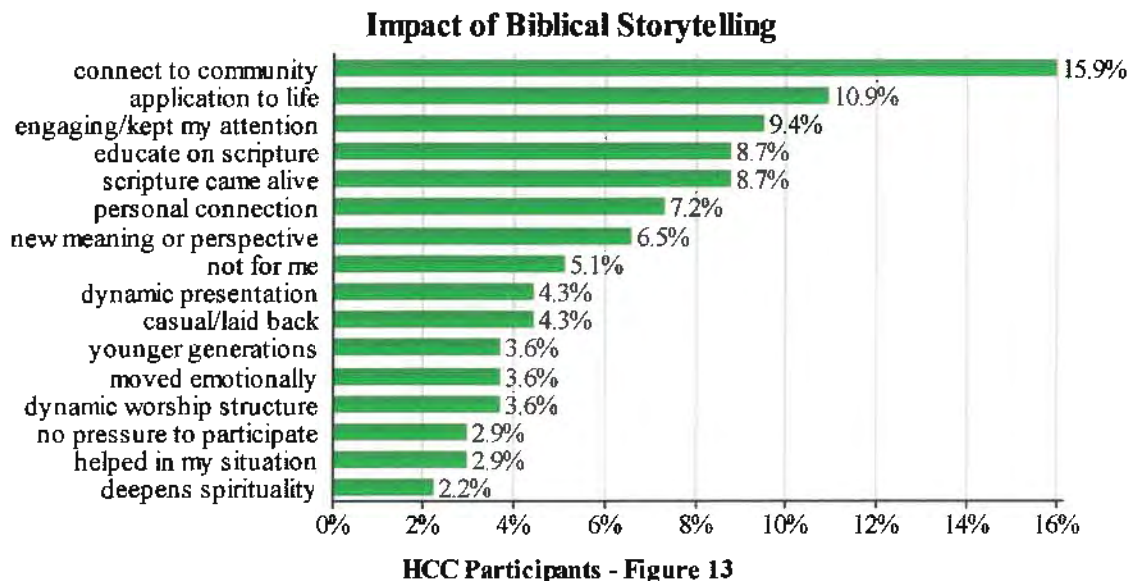
A smaller focus group of fifteen HCC participants were asked whether they remembered the stories after the service. All responses came within 12 to 36 hours after the biblical storytelling service. 73% of respondents had consistent recall of the biblical story after three days (Figure 12).

Since experiencing biblical storytelling worship, I have remembered the story and reflection time.



Impact of Biblical Storytelling on Participants

Responses to the biblical storytelling service were varied yet overwhelmingly positive for HCC respondents. In evaluations and interviews, several common experiences emerged in the data. The top three reoccurring themes in order of frequency



included: connection to the community, application of the biblical stories to real life, and being more deeply engaged in the worship experience (Figure 13).

Respondents overall found storytelling to be much more memorable and thought-provoking than just listening to the scripture and certainly more than reading scripture. It was very successful in helping to understand the scriptures better. While there were a few participants who felt the experience was “a bit over the top sometimes,” they did acknowledge how others responded to it, especially youth and those that are not familiar with scripture. Consistent written reactions such as, “it brings the bible to life,” “kept my attention,” “connected with others,” and “relevant to my life” were significant responses among the majority of participants.

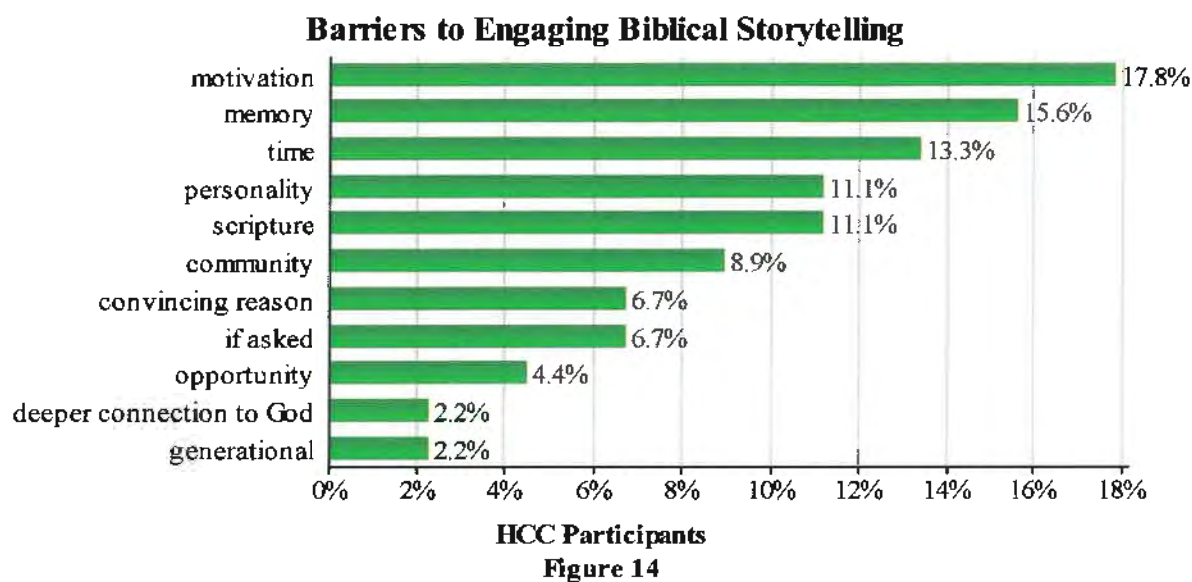
A few of these responses are worth reporting in deeper detail:

- I feel the format of Symposium can have a great impact on my spiritual formation (or rather in my case reformation). This format takes a very practical approach to how scriptures can actually apply to us today. Additionally, it is an environment that fosters honest discussion of both doubts and insights.
- It makes the story seem more human, more alive, and more relevant to today's issues. I do not find myself thinking about the prior Sunday's story very often, but I do think it resonates unconsciously.
- I enjoy participating in the worship, watching and engaging in the story, learning more about the context (to me this is the most difficult part to do on my own) and discussing around the table in a way that helps connect my life to the story and to form relationships with others.
- Makes the stories come alive. Hearing them together helps connecting to others—makes God more accessible.
- When I understand the context of the story and can connect it to my own emotions and experiences, it brings the Bible to life for me. Unfortunately, this is not something I feel I can do on my own so I prefer not reading the Bible by myself as I find myself feeling frustrated and even offended by what I read.

- It helps me to focus on the passages of the day. It also helps make the meaning clearer. My mind often wanders during a traditional Scripture reading.

Barriers to Engaging Biblical Storytelling

Yet there were also many barriers to engaging this paradigm as a mechanism for spiritual formation. When HCC respondents considered their barriers to biblical storytelling, 20% said they needed more motivation. 17% noted they would participate if they had a better memory. 15% identified that lack of time was a prohibiting factor. 10% needed a better understanding of scripture. 7% would need a convincing reason to, 7% would consider it if the community was more involved, 7% would tell stories by heart if they were asked. 5% would need more opportunities, and 3% would need a deeper connection to God (Figure 14).

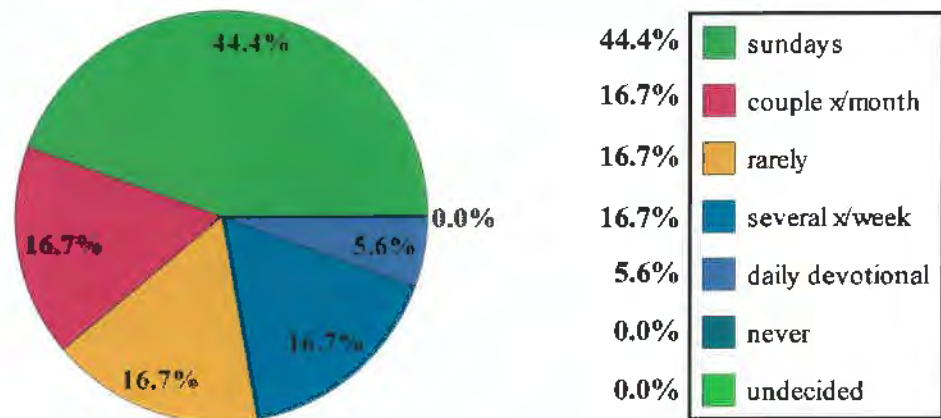


Intent for Engaging Biblical Storytelling as a Spiritual Discipline

When asked how HCC respondents would consider engaging biblical storytelling in the future, 45% was responsive to experiencing it every Sunday, while 17% would

consider it several times a month, and another 17% would engage the process several times a week. 6% said they would engage a biblical storytelling process on a daily basis, and less than 17% would rarely engage the process at all (Figure 15).

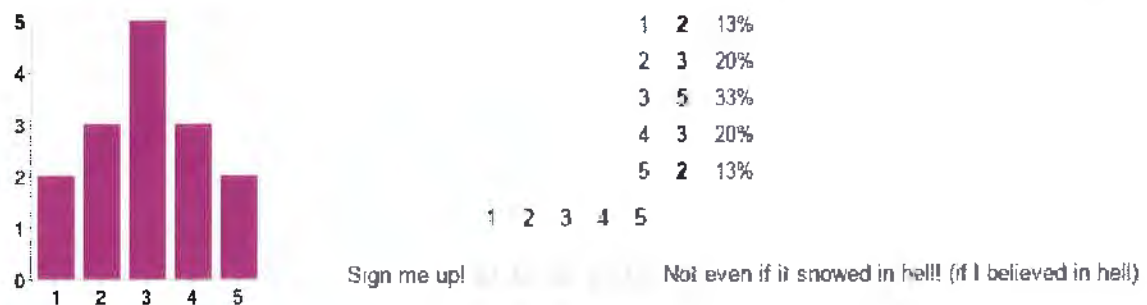
Intent for Biblical Storytelling as a Spiritual Discipline



HCC Participants
Figure 15

A smaller focus group of HCC participants were asked if they were motivated to learn and tell biblical stories by heart as a spiritual discipline after experiencing biblical storytelling worship. 66% were open to deepening relationship with biblical storytelling as a mechanism for spiritual growth (Figure 16).

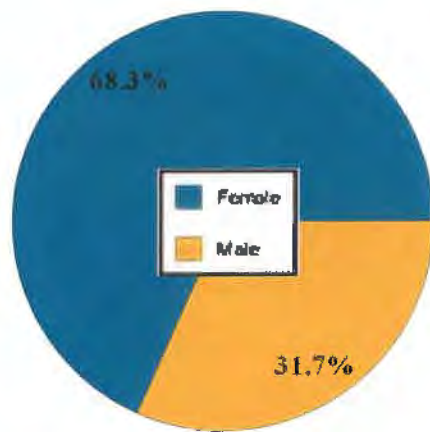
I would love to learn and tell biblical stories by heart (not in public but as a spiritual discipline).



HCC Participants - Figure 16

Data Analysis of Seminary Participants

Gender



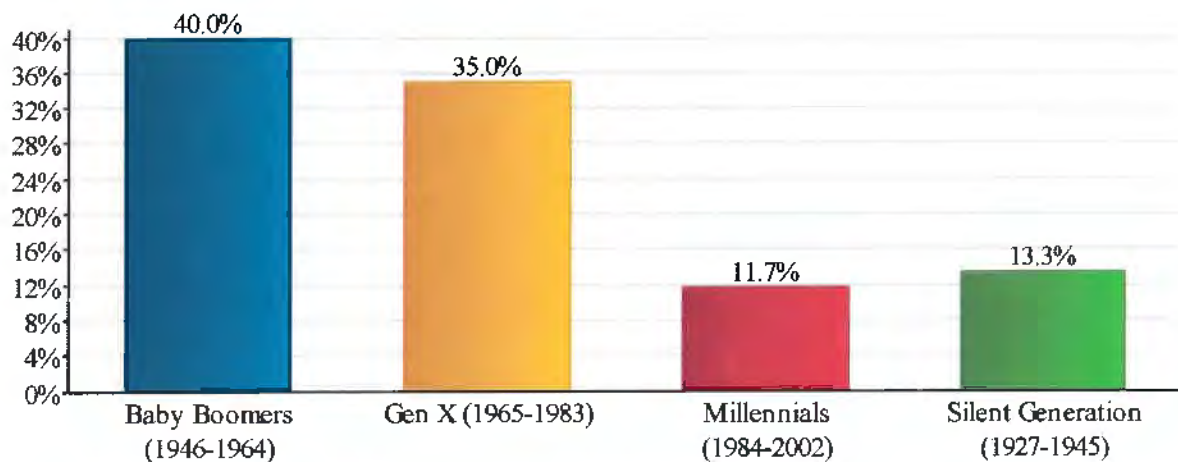
Seminary Students
Figure 17

In the sampling of sixty seminary students, 68% were female and 32% were male (Figure 17).

38% of seminary student surveyed identified as Baby Boomers, born between the dates of 1945 and 1964. Roughly 36% of students self identified as Gen Xers, with birthdates somewhere between 1965 and 1983.

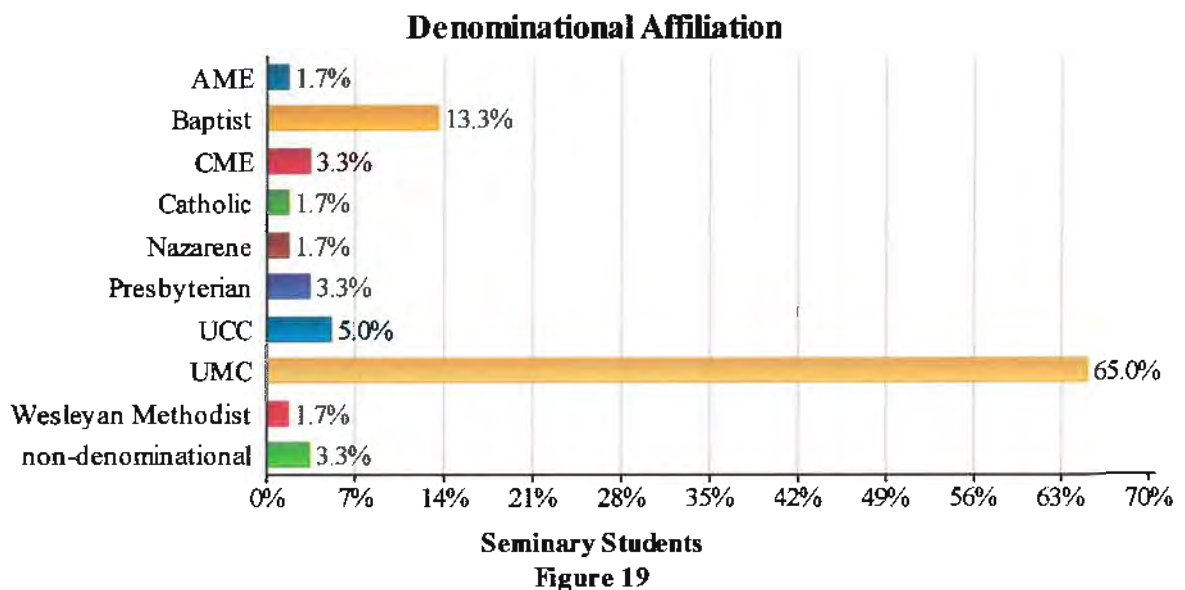
About 12% of surveyed seminary students were born between the years of 1984 and 2002, and referred to as Millennials. And just a little over 10% of students surveyed at the seminary were from the Silent Generation, born between the years of 1927 and 1945 (Figure 18).

Generational Demographics



Seminary Students
Figure 18

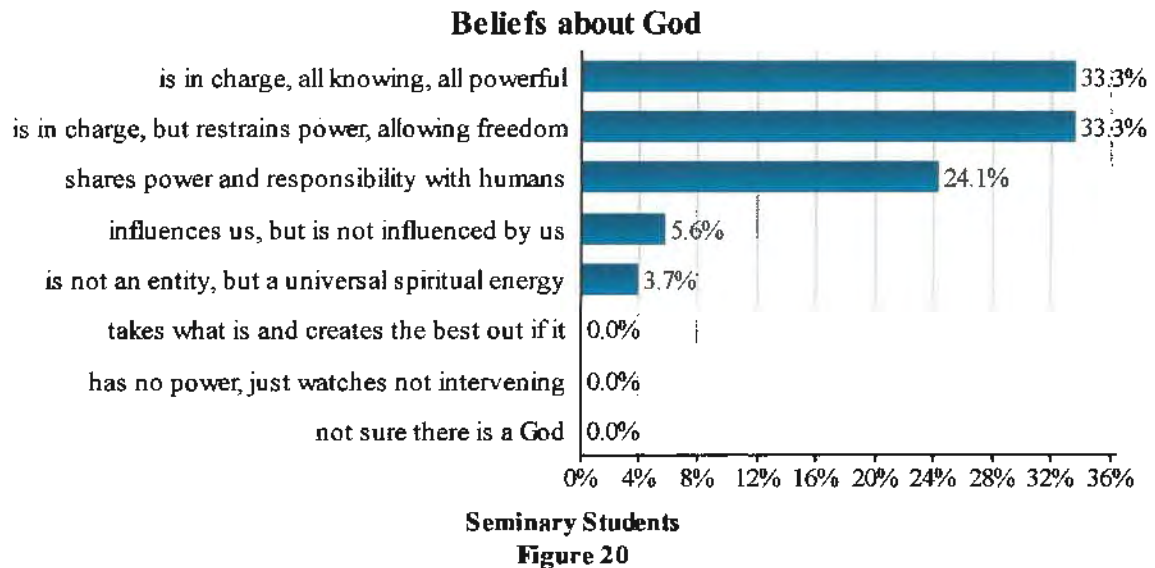
Denominational affiliation of these seminary students were heavily weighted as United Methodists with over 64%. The next largest group was Baptist at 12%, followed by 5% from the United Church of Christ, Presbyterian and CME both at 3.4%, with very small percentage coming from the AME church, the CME church, Catholic, Nazarene, and nondenominational. The other 3.4% did not identify their affiliation (Figure 19).



Beliefs about God

These seminary students were asked to identify their understanding of God. 33% believed that God is in charge, is all-knowing, and is all-powerful. 33% defined God as being in charge, but restrains power, allowing human freedom. 24% believed that God shares power and responsibility with human beings. Less than 6% believed that God influences us, but is not influenced by us. And a little less than 4% believed that God is not an entity at all, but a universal spiritual energy (Figure 20). Two additional understandings of God were asked in the survey, but were not identified as being a part of any seminary student's belief system. They included: God has no power, just watches not

intervening; and Uncertainty that there is a God. One write-in description suggested: God chooses not to intervene over humans or creation. He has given us the Holy Spirit.



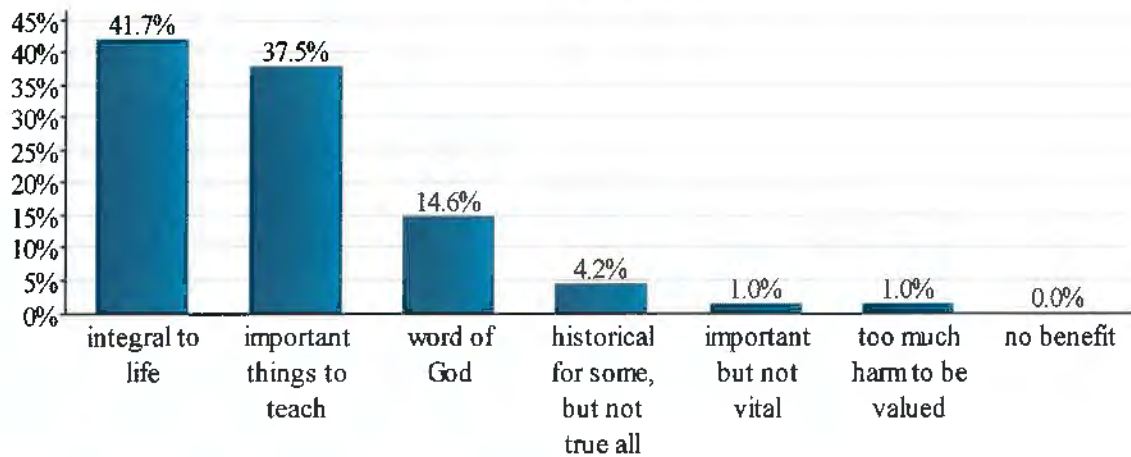
Authority of the Bible in Spiritual Life

Seminary students also responded in a survey to a variety of options identifying the authority of the Bible in their spiritual life. Over 40% of respondents identified the Bible as being integral to their life. 36% identified the Bible as having important things to teach them. 14% believe the Bible is the inerrant word of God with the same percentage suggesting that it is a historical testament of God to some, but it's not relevant for everyone. Less than 1%, believed the Bible to be important but not vital, or has caused too much harm to be valued. No respondents suggested the Bible was not relevant for everyone, or that it had any benefit at all (Figure 21).

Additional comments by seminary students included:

- I believe in the spirit of the Bible and not the letter.
- The Bible is to be taken seriously as the reliable testimony of God's salvific work, pointing us to the authentic Word of God—Jesus Christ.

Authority of Bible



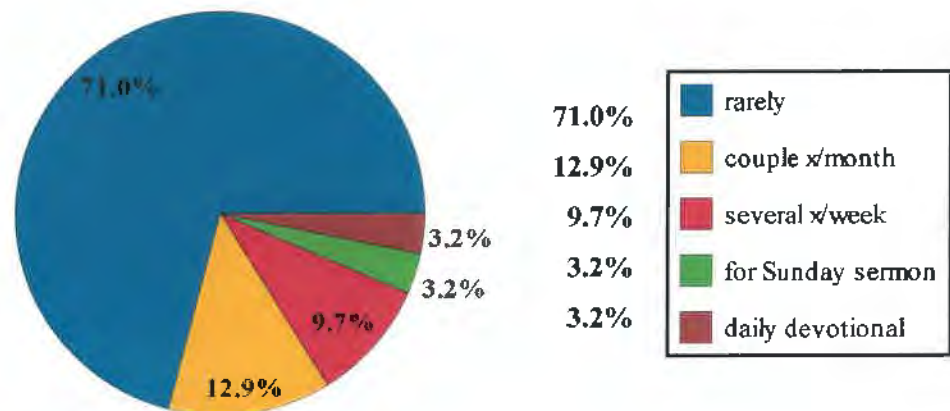
Seminary Students

Figure 21

Frequency of Memorizing Scripture for Seminary Students

Seminary students were also asked how frequently they memorize Scripture prior to experiencing biblical storytelling in worship. 71% suggested they rarely memorize Scripture. Almost 13% said they memorize Scripture a couple times a month, less than 10% memorize Scripture several times a week and only 3% memorize Scripture as a daily devotional or for their Sunday sermon (Figure 22).

Memorize scripture prior to service

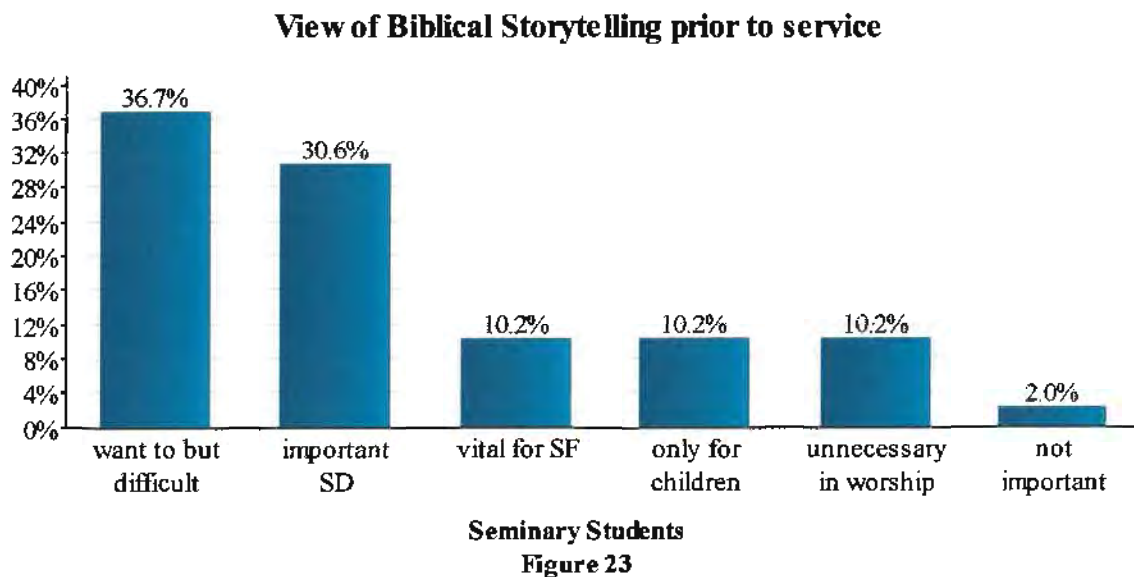


Seminary Students

Figure 22

View of Biblical Storytelling Prior to Service

Seminary students were also asked about their view of biblical storytelling prior to worship. 34% said they would like learn scripture by heart but feel it is too difficult. 20% suggested it could be important for spiritual development. Less than 10% believed it was only for children while 10% believed it was unnecessary in worship. However 10% also believed it was vital for spiritual formation. Less than 2% of respondents felt that it was not important at all (Figure 23).



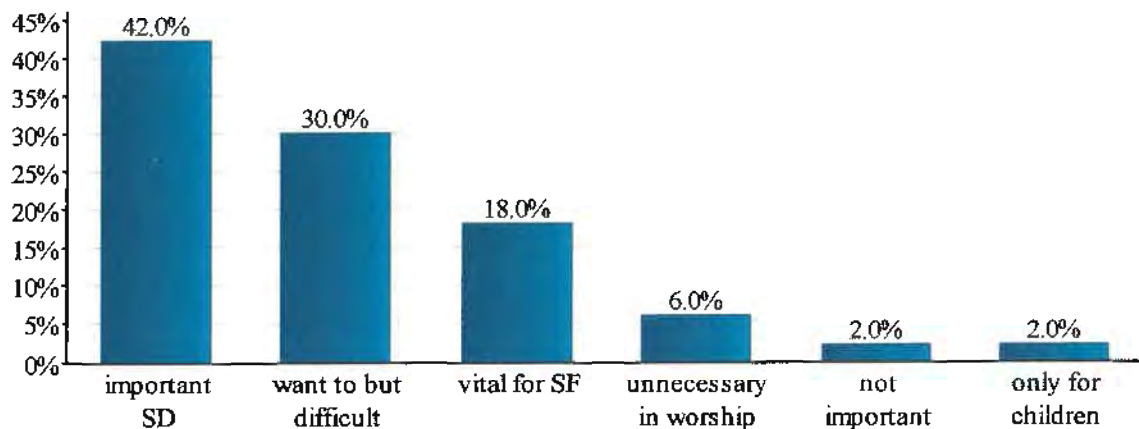
View of Biblical Storytelling After Service

Seminary students were then surveyed about their view of biblical storytelling after the worship service. 42% suggested that it is an important spiritual discipline. 30% suggested they would like to do it but still find it difficult. 18% identified biblical storytelling as vital for spiritual formation. Only 6% felt it was unnecessary in worship, 2% that it was not important at all. No one suggested that biblical storytelling was only for children (Figure 24).

A few additional comments from seminary students included:

- It is important to start scripture memorization in young children and youth in SS or education or small group settings.
- I still remember a lot from memorizing scripture while growing up.
- Scripture memorizations were a primary means for Christ-forming in my life.

View of Biblical Storytelling after service

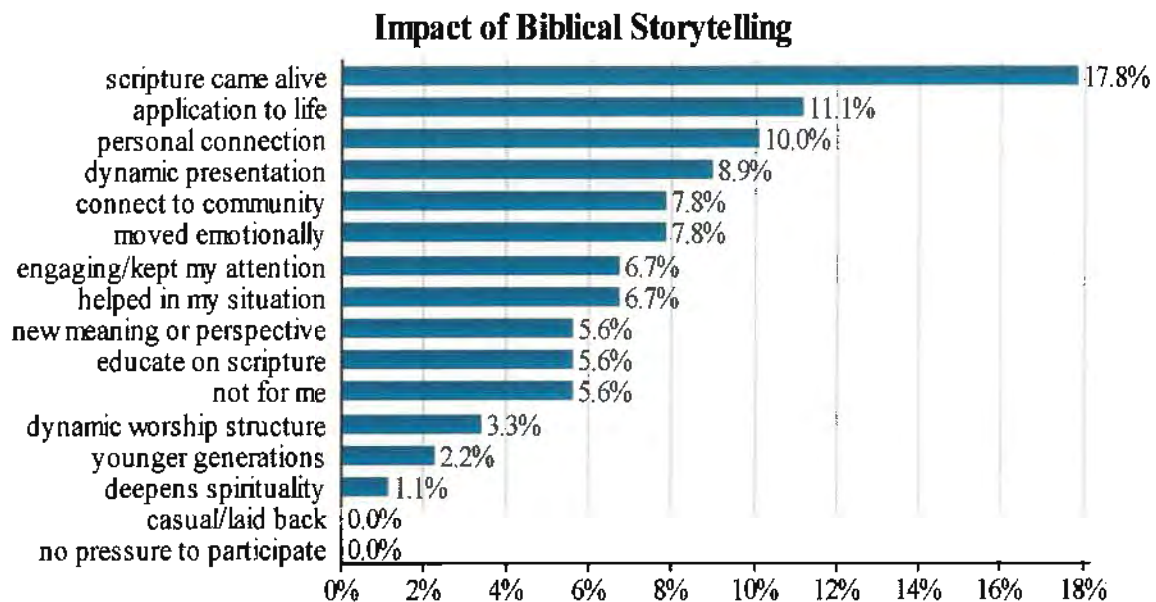


Seminary Student

Figure 24

Impact of Biblical Storytelling on Participants

The impact of biblical storytelling for seminary students was equally positive, although for different reasons. Less than 6% of respondents suggested that biblical storytelling was not for them. Recurring themes in order of frequency were: scripture came alive, its application to life, and a personal connection was made to the story. These responses tended to reflect a continuing focus on outreach evangelism versus community building. While stories had significant meaning on a personal level, the greater value came from applying its lessons to exterior relationships such as family, friends, colleagues, church members and the unchurched. Some even suggested that this story itself was calling them to share the experience with others (Figure 25).



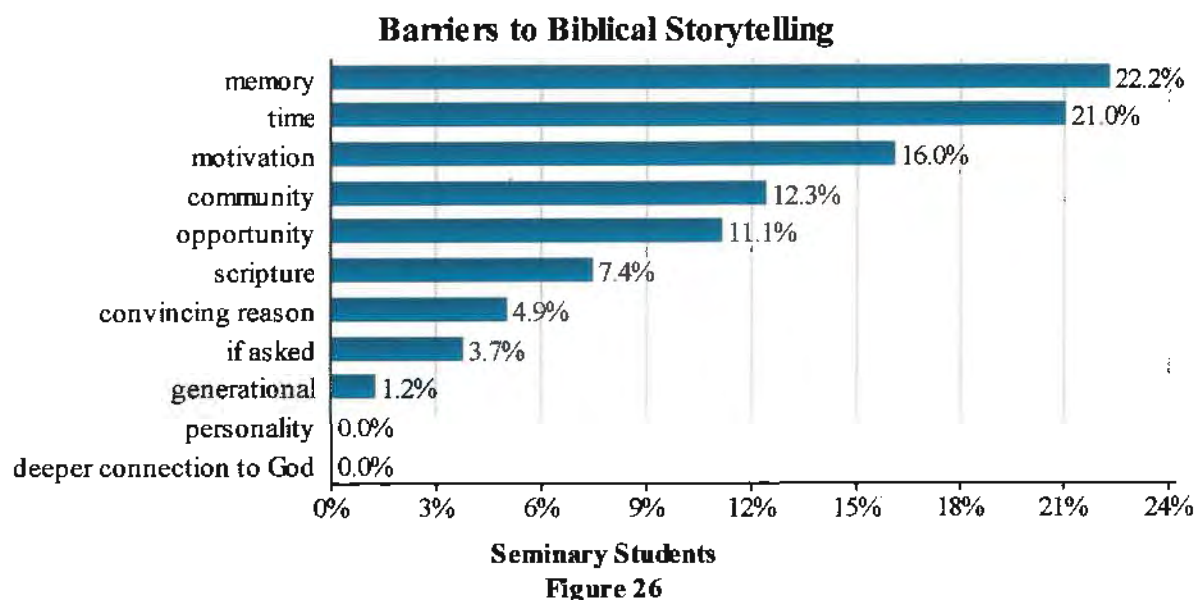
Seminary Students - Figure 25

Seminary students were also able to question their own call from an experience of the story, identifying with challenges represented in spiritual formation. Integration of biblical truths with faith was an important value. An experience of the emotions brought out from the text provided significant learning about the characters in the story. Others were reminded of theological concepts that they had been studying, such as grace. The probing questions asked during the experience were particularly pressing for some, so the reflection and prayer aspects of the service were important in the reflection process.

Barriers to Engaging Biblical Storytelling

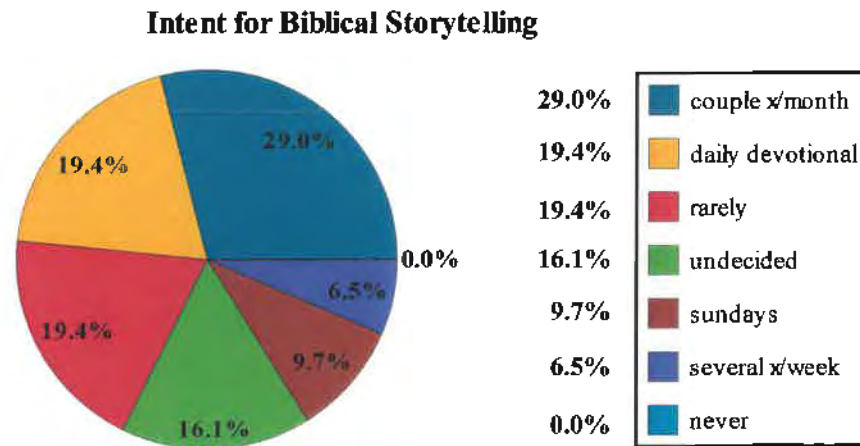
When seminary students considered their barriers to biblical storytelling, 22% said they would participate if they had a better memory. Almost 21% identified the lack of time as a prohibiting factor. 16% said they still needed motivation. Little over 12% would participate if their community was involved. 11% suggested they would use biblical storytelling in ministry if there were more opportunities. Little over 7% said they

needed a better understanding of Scripture. Around 4% would engage biblical storytelling if they were asked. In less than 3% said they would need a convincing reason to do it (Figure 26).



Intent for Engaging Biblical Storytelling as a Spiritual Discipline

Seminary students were surveyed about how likely they would engage biblical storytelling for themselves. 29% suggested they would learn stories by heart a couple times a month. 16% said they were not quite sure whether they would engage biblical storytelling in the future, 19% said they would rarely engage biblical storytelling on their own. However 19% also said they would learn stories by heart as a daily devotional, 10% said they would engage biblical storytelling on Sunday mornings. 6.5% said they would engage the biblical storytelling paradigm several times a week, while no one said they would never engage it again (Figure 27).



Seminary Students
Figure 27

When asked whether they feel biblical storytelling worship could impact the spiritual formation of members in their congregation or ministry context, students responded with the following comments.

- I think it will impact the spiritual formation of my church members. It gets them engaged in the story like a watching a play or sitting around a camp fire.
- We all learn in different ways. The movement and story aspects make the Bible real. Since we have become a TV and Video world, stories can be powerful tools to reach people.
- Some may have a need to have exposure to the Word that way. Just to have the mental imagery is something that makes the scripture come to life.
- It would be something new and engaging for both self reflection and internal transformation, by helping congregants memorize scripture and learn the stories.
- Biblical storytelling brings the story to life. It is more conversational in that it is how I would tell a story at home if I wanted to share something about my life. I really want to do this!!
- I could see the storytelling as a vital part of worship, although my congregations do not have flexible seating that would be conducive to the talk and prayer stations. I could certainly see it as part of a spiritual retreat or small group ministry.
- There are times I am familiar enough with scripture to repeat it by heart or mostly by heart for worship, and I believe that is beneficial to the audience in

those times. I think many people know the stories by heart, but are intimidated by knowing the scripture by heart. Seeing others able to do it may motivate them, but I also think it shows that scripture does not have to be read word-for-word.

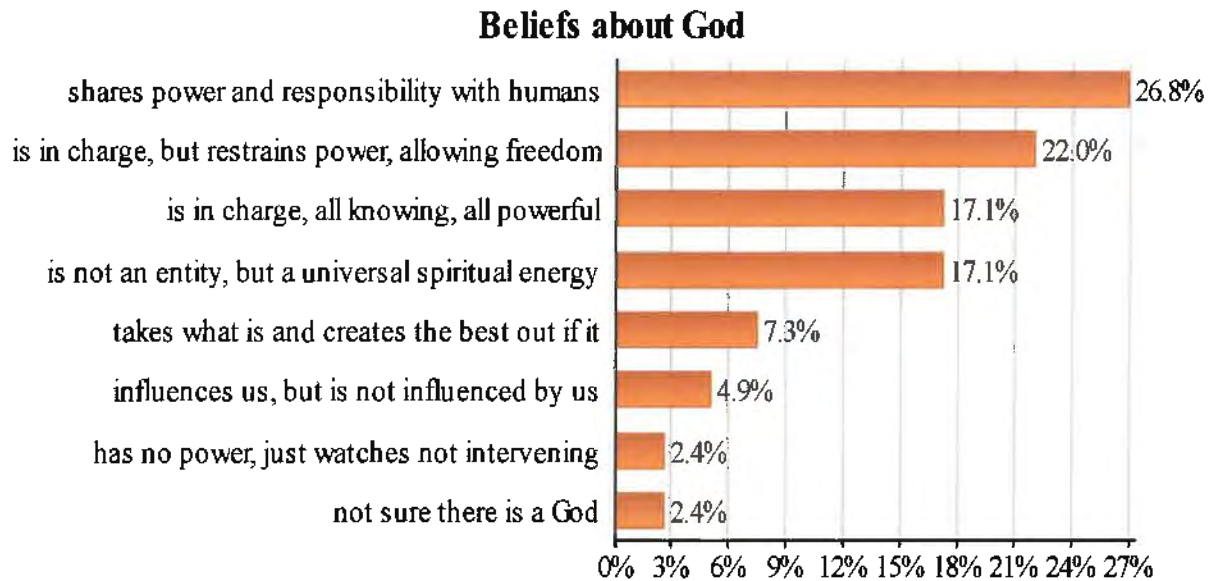
- It makes the story more real . . . which is easier for people to connect with.

Data Analysis of Participants by Generational Demographics

The Silent Generation

Of the total 151 participants involved in the collection of data for this doctoral project, 21% were born between the years of 1927 in 1945. This demographic sampling of project participants are referred to as the Silent Generation or "Silents". The Silents' responses to the understanding of God, and the authority of the Bible in spiritual life tended to be slightly less conservative and a little more progressive in theology than the overall sampling.

When Silents were surveyed about their understanding of God, 27% believed that God shares power and responsibility with humans versus 22% in the comprehensive sampling. 22% affirmed that God is in charge, but restrains power, allowing freedom of choice which was the same percentage overall. 17% believed that God is not an entity, but a universal spiritual energy which was also the same percentage in the overall sampling. 17% believed that God is completely in charge, all-knowing, and all-powerful versus 20% overall. 7% of respondents suggested that God takes what is and creates the best out of it versus 6% overall. Less than 5%, believed that God influences us, but is not influenced by us which was the same in the overall percentage. 2.4% of respondents believed that God has no power versus 1.3% overall, and the same percentages believed that God just watches but not intervening, or not sure there is a God (Figure 28).



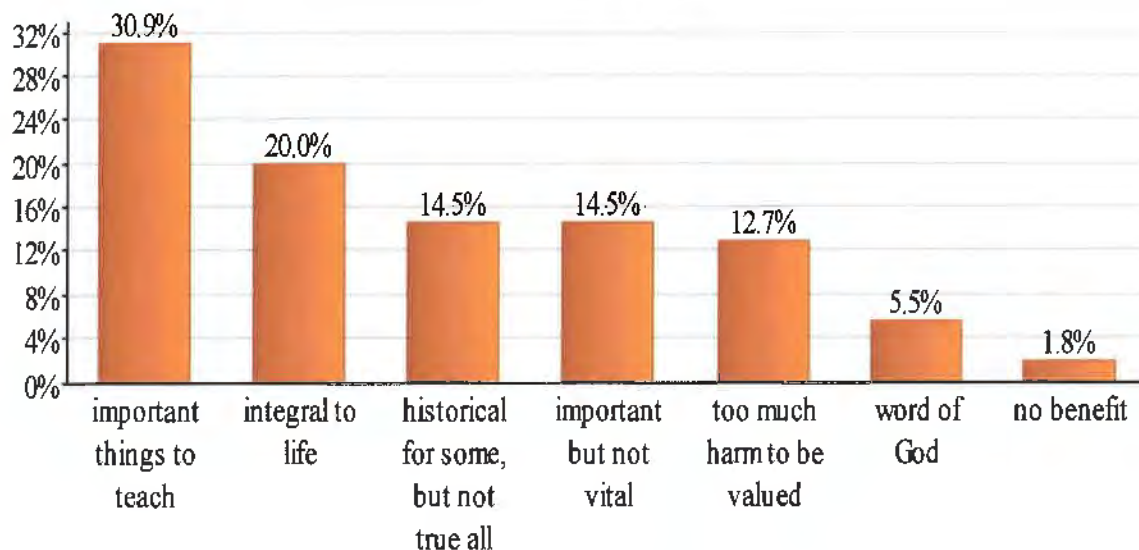
Silent Generation

Figure 28

When identifying the authority of the Bible in the spiritual life, 31% believe the Bible to have important lessons to teach all people, compared to over 36% overall. 20% identified the Bible as being integral to their life versus 24% in the comprehensive sampling. 14.5% believe the Bible to be important but not vital versus 8.5% overall. 12% also believe the Bible to have done too much harm to be valued, versus 8% of all participants. Nearly 13% did feel that the Bible was a historical testament for some but is not true for everyone, versus 7% overall. Only 5.5% believe the Bible to be the inerrant word of God versus 6.5% overall. Less than 2% suggested the Bible had any benefit at all which is about the same percentage for the entire sampling (Figure 29).

The highest areas of impact that biblical storytelling had on Silents were in their connection to community, making a personal connection with the story, learning new lessons from scripture, and being engaged by the experience (Figure 30).

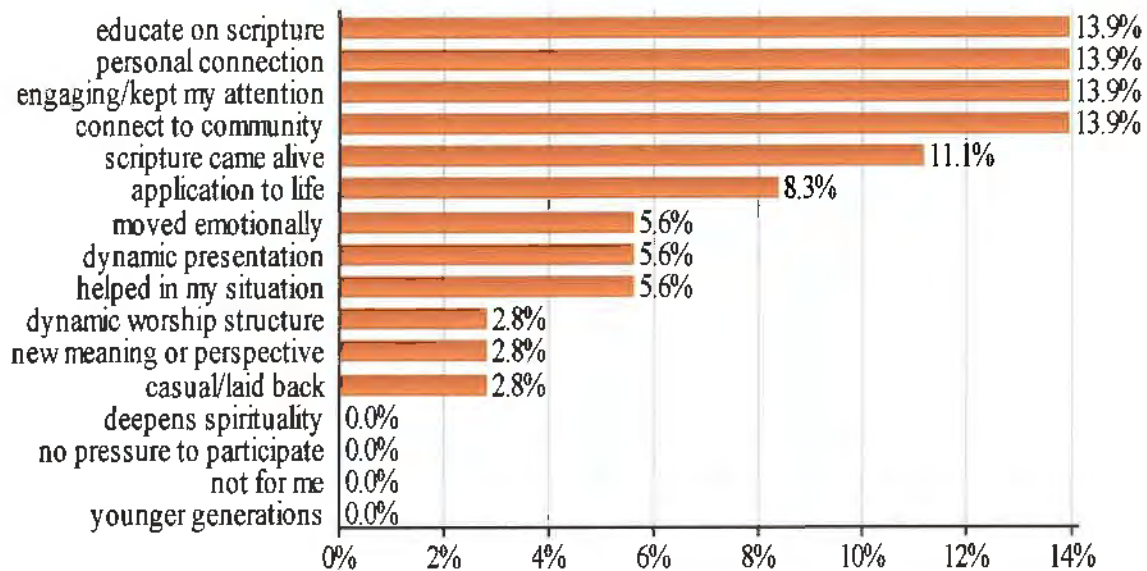
Authority of Bible



Silent Generation

Figure 29

Impact of Biblical Storytelling



Silent Generation

Figure 30

Significant barriers to engaging biblical storytelling as a spiritual discipline were motivation, more time to devote themselves to it, and a better appreciation for scripture in their lives (Figure 31).

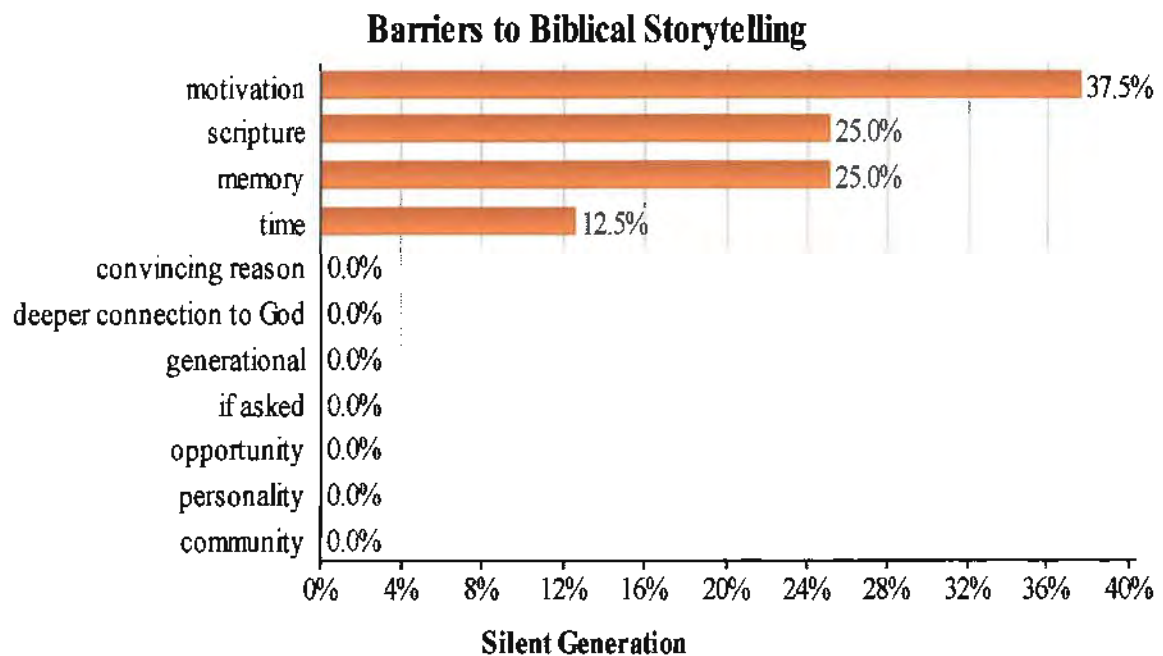


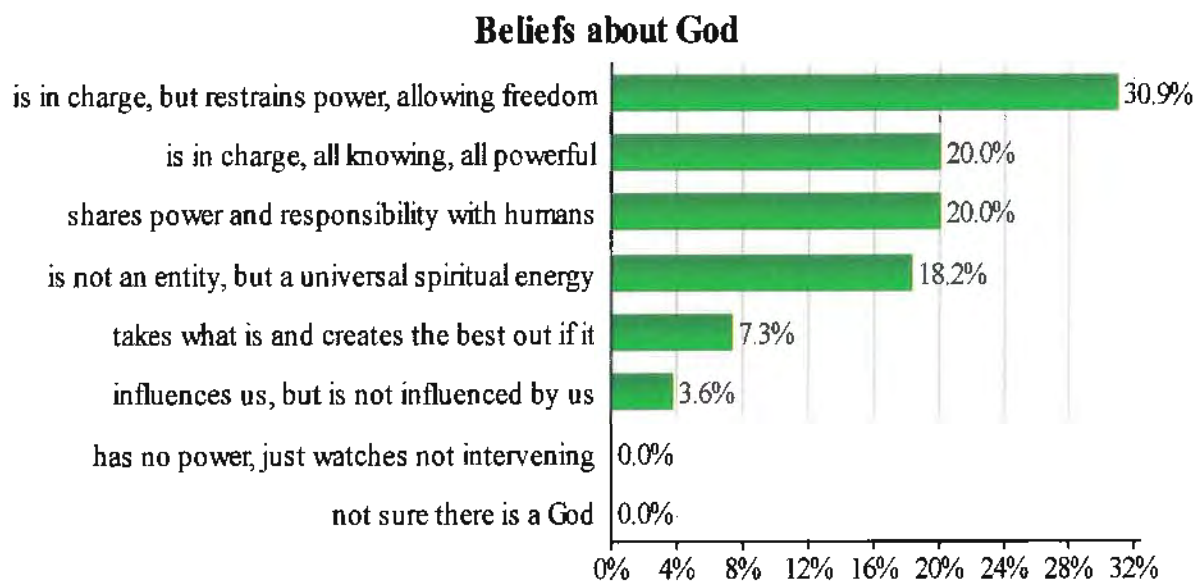
Figure 31

Baby Boomers

39% of participants surveyed identified as Baby Boomers, born between the dates of 1945 and 1964. Baby Boomer responses to the understanding of God tended to be slightly more progressive theologically than the overall sampling, yet when identifying the authority of the Bible in spiritual life they were much more conservative in their beliefs.

When surveyed about their understanding of God, 20% of Baby Boomers believed that God shares power and responsibility with humans versus 22% in the comprehensive sampling. Almost a third of respondents, over 31%, affirmed that God is in charge, but restrains power, allowing freedom of choice versus 22% overall. 18%

understand that God is not an entity, but a universal spiritual energy versus 16% overall, and 20% believed that God is completely in charge, all-knowing, all-powerful which was the same as the overall sampling. Additionally, 7% of respondents suggested that God takes what is and creates the best out of it versus 6% overall. A smaller percentage, less than 4%, believed that God influences us, but is not influenced by us versus 5% in the overall percentage. No respondents believed God has no power, just watching but not intervening, nor expressed a belief that God did not exist (Figure 32).

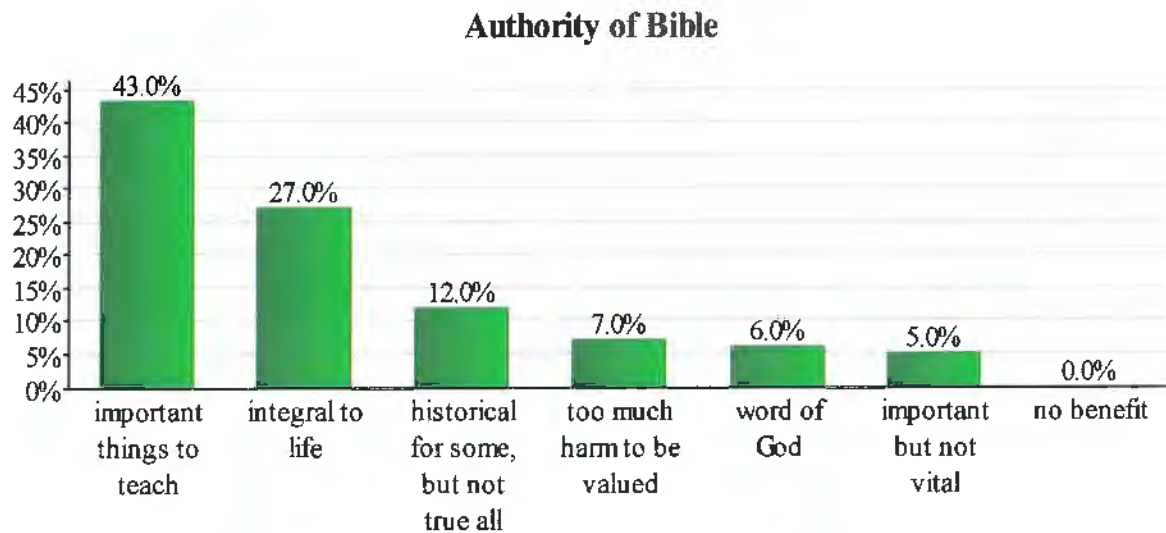


Baby Boomers

Figure 32

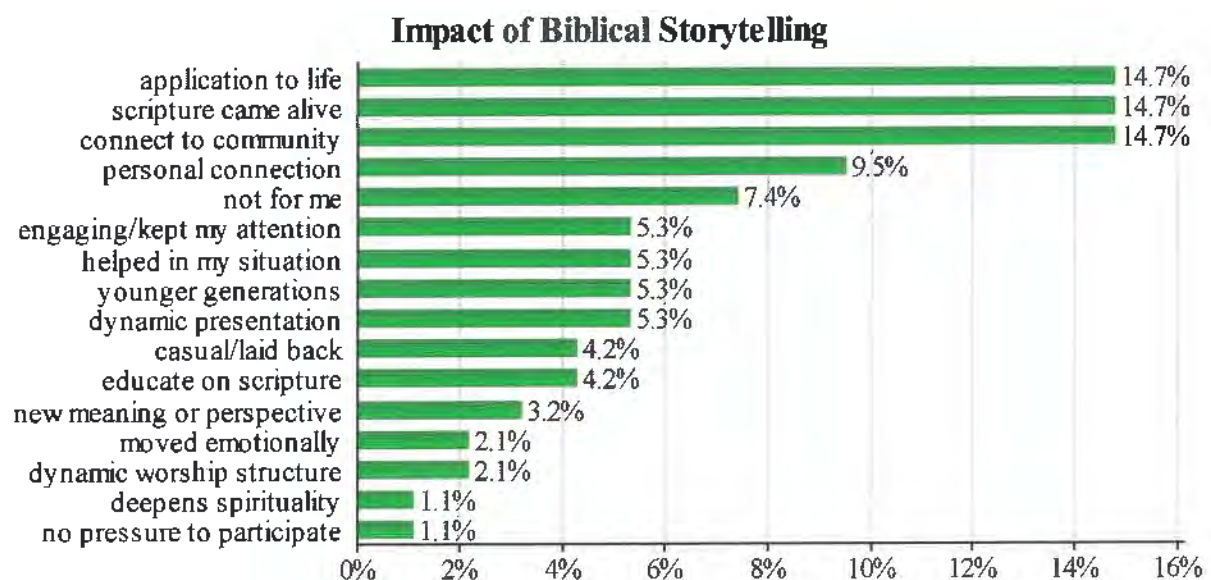
When identifying the authority of the Bible in the spiritual life, 43% believe the Bible to have important lessons to teach all people, compared to over 36% overall. 27% identified the Bible as being integral to their life versus 24% in the comprehensive sampling. Only 5% believed the Bible to be important but not vital versus 8.5% overall. Less than 7% believed the Bible to have done too much harm to be valued, versus 8% of all participants. Yet 6% also believed the Bible to be the inerrant word of God versus

6.5% overall. 12% also believed that the Bible was an accurate historical testament for some but is not true for everyone, versus 7% overall. No respondent suggested the Bible has no benefit at all versus 2% for the entire sampling (Figure 33).



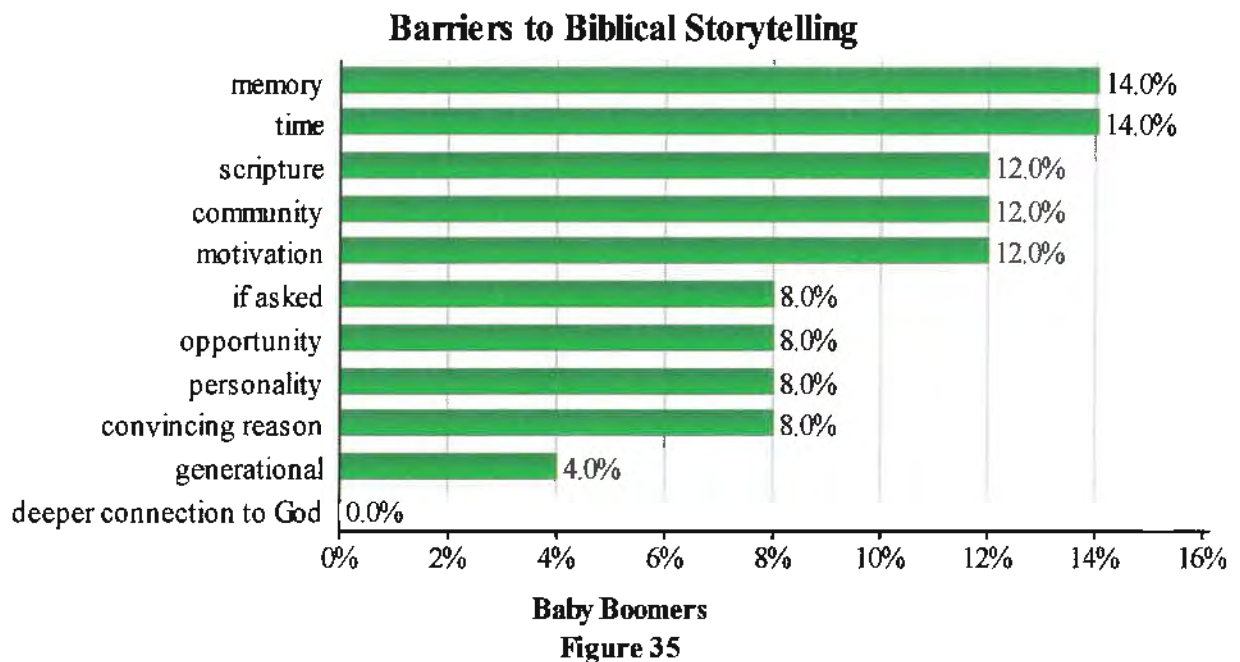
**Baby Boomers
Figure 33**

The three highest areas of impact that biblical storytelling had on Baby Boomers were in their connection to community, its practical application to their lives, and the way scripture came alive during the experience (Figure 34).



Baby Boomers - Figure 34

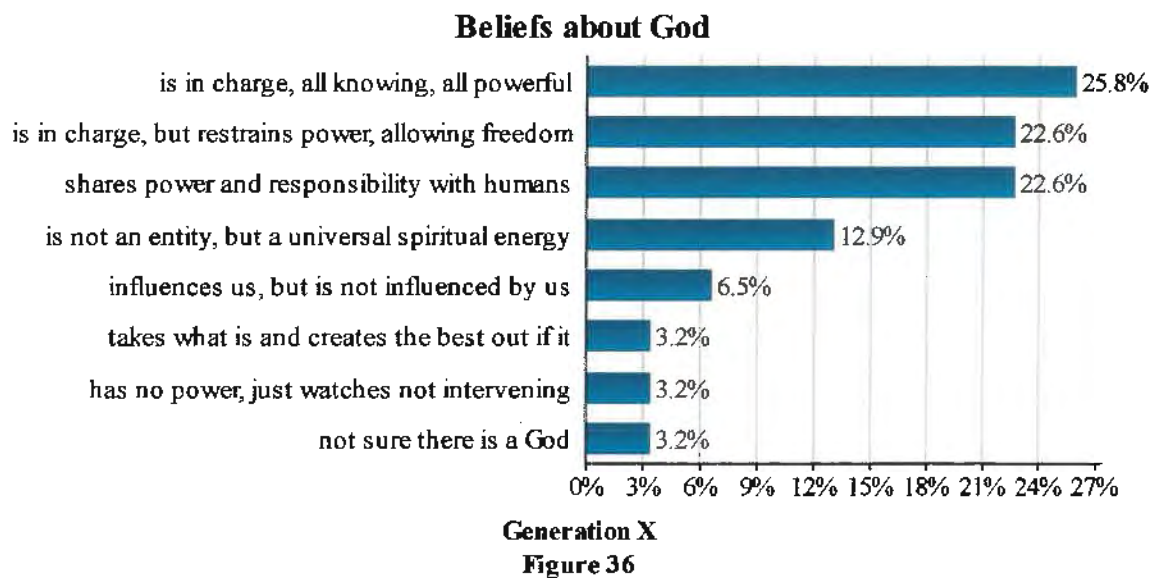
Significant barriers to engaging biblical storytelling as a spiritual discipline were a better memory and more time to devote themselves to it (Figure 35).



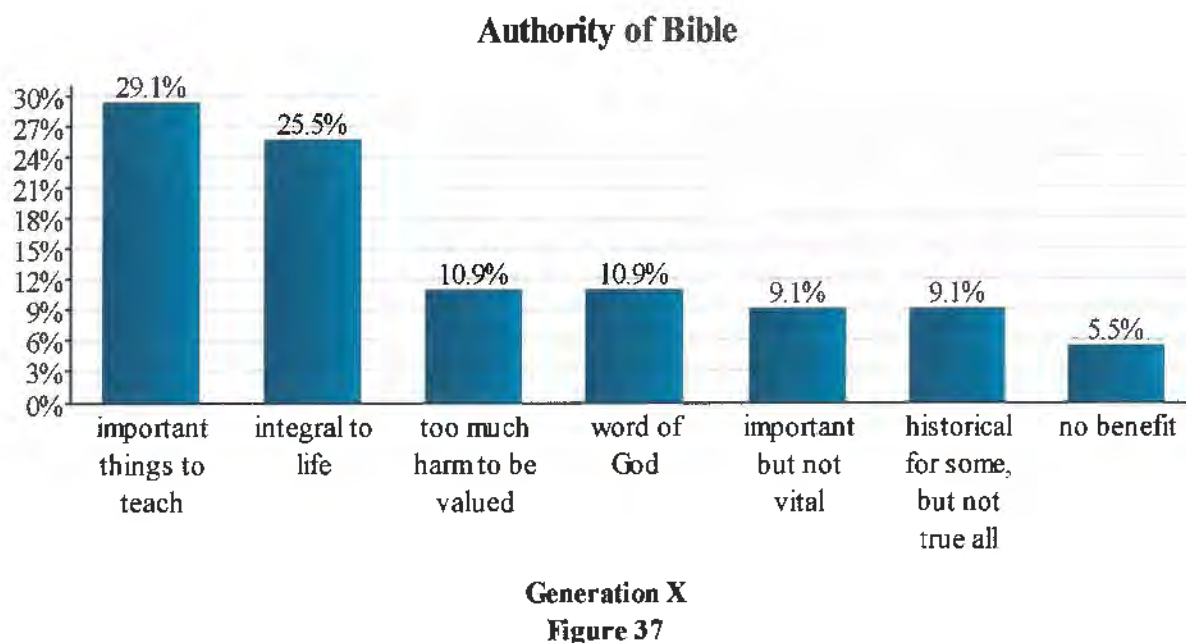
Generation X

Almost 27% of participants self identified as Generation X, with birthdates between 1965 and 1983, and are also referred to as "Gen Xers." Gen Xer responses to the understanding of God tended to be slightly more conservative theologically than the overall sampling. Yet when identifying the authority of the Bible in spiritual life they were much more liberal in their beliefs. When surveyed about their understanding of God, 23% of Gen Xers believed that God shares power and responsibility with humans versus 22% in the comprehensive sampling. The same percentage affirmed that God is in charge, but restrains power, allowing freedom of choice versus 22% overall. Only 13% understand that God is not an entity, but a universal spiritual energy versus 16% overall, and almost 26% believed that God is completely in charge, all-knowing, all-powerful

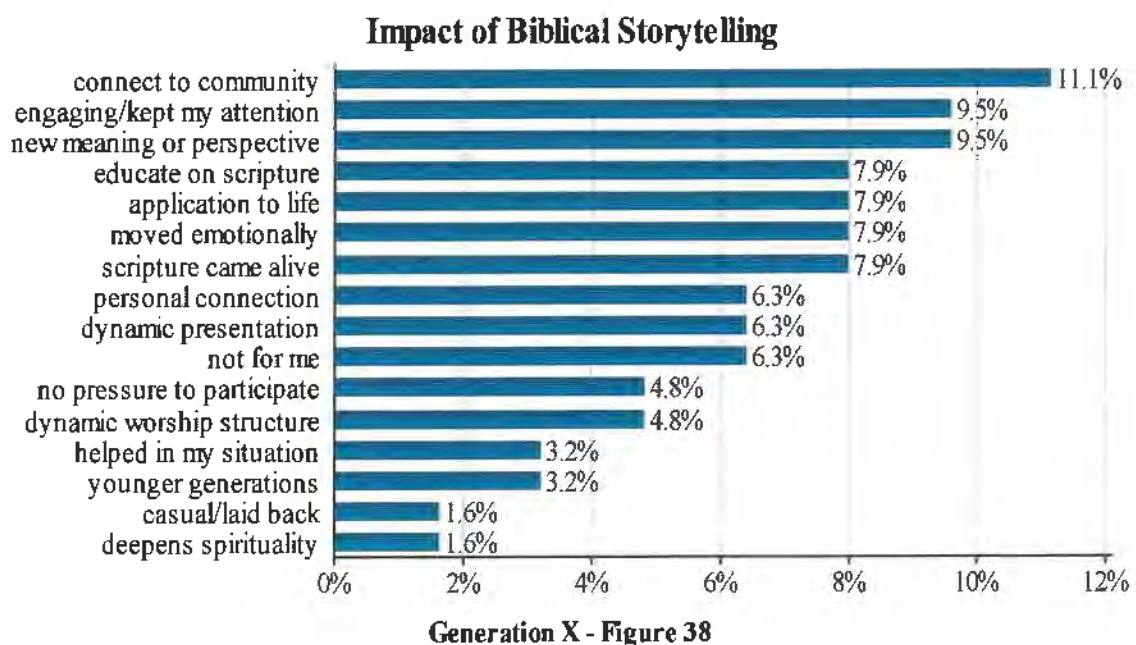
versus 20.5% of the overall sampling. Only 3% of respondents suggested that God takes what is and creates the best out of it. 6.5% believed that God influences us, but is not influenced by us versus 5% in the overall sampling. A little over 3% believed God has no power, just watching but not intervening, and the same percentage doubted that God even exists (Figure 36).



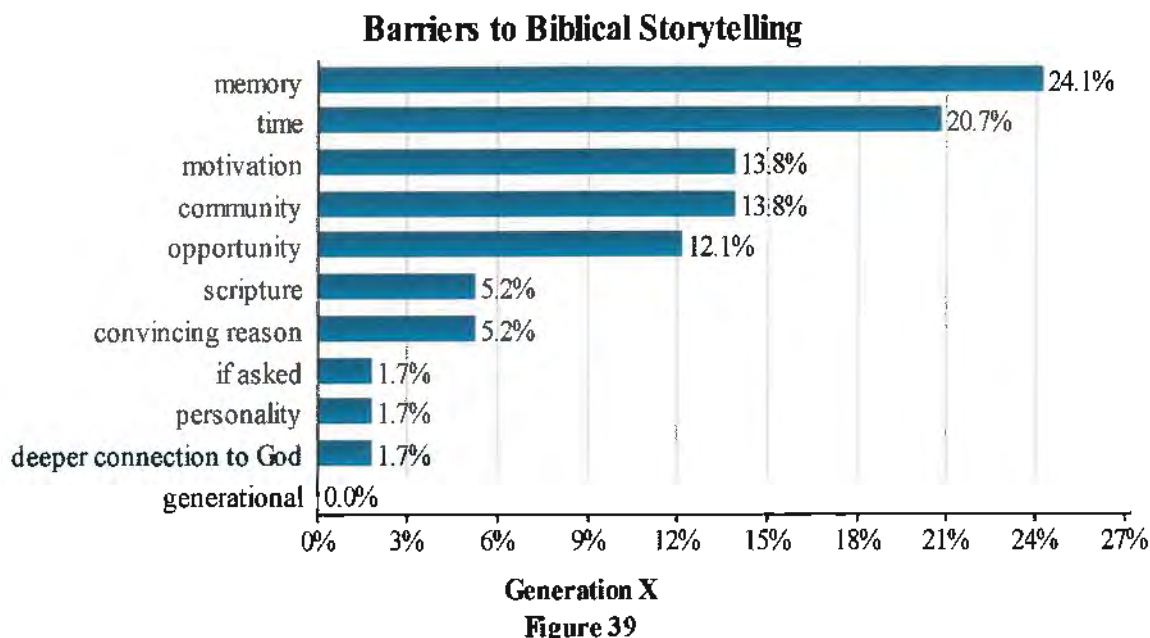
When identifying the authority of the Bible in the spiritual life, 29% believed the Bible to have important lessons to teach all people, compared to over 36% overall. 25.5% identified the Bible as being integral to their life versus 24% in the comprehensive sampling. 9% believed the Bible to be important but not vital versus 8.5% overall. Less than 11% believed the Bible to have done too much harm to be valued, versus 8% of all participants. Yet 11% also believed the Bible to be the inerrant word of God versus 6.5% overall. 9% also believed that the Bible was an accurate historical testament for some but is not true for everyone, versus 7% overall. 5.5% suggested the Bible has no benefit at all versus 2% for the entire sampling (Figure 37).



The three highest areas of impact that biblical storytelling had on Gen Xers were their connection to community, experiencing new meaning or perspective, and being engaged by the experience (Figure 38).



Significant barriers to engaging biblical storytelling as a spiritual discipline were a better memory and more time to devote themselves to it (Figure 39).

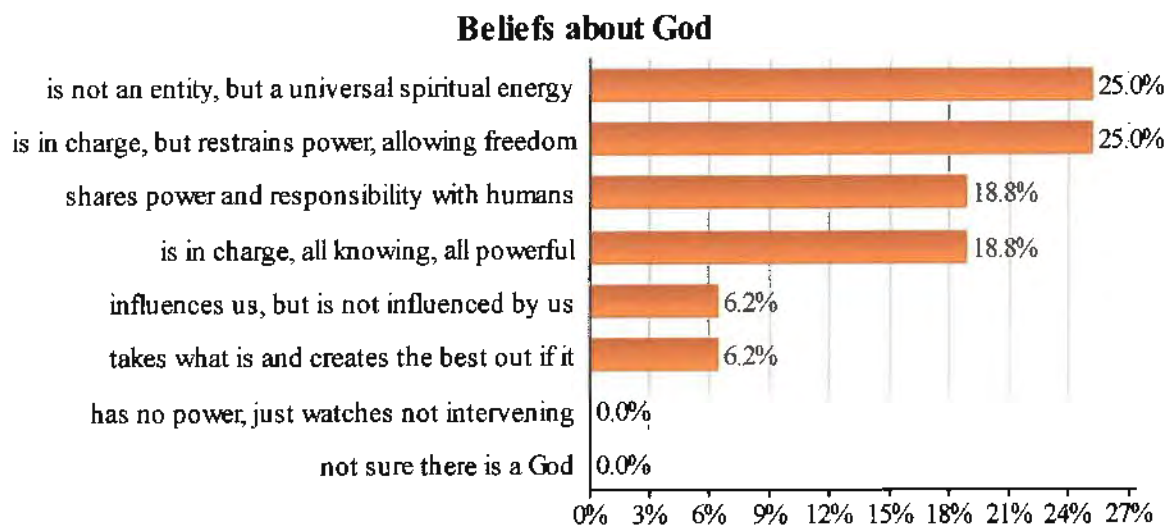


Millennials

About 11% of participants were born between the years of 1984 and 2002, and are referred to as Millennials. Their responses to the understanding of God, and the authority of the Bible in spiritual life tended to be more progressive theologically than the overall sampling.

When surveyed about their understanding of God, 19% of Millennials believed that God shares power and responsibility with humans versus 22% in the comprehensive sampling. 25%, affirmed that God is in charge, but restrains power, allowing freedom of choice versus 22% overall. 25% understand that God is not an entity, but a universal spiritual energy versus 16% overall, and less than 19% believed that God is completely in charge, all-knowing, all-powerful versus 20.5% in the overall sampling. Additionally, 6%

of respondents suggested that God takes what is and creates the best out of it versus 6% overall. 6% also believed that God influences us, but is not influenced by us versus 5% in the overall percentage. No respondents believed God has no power, just watching but not intervening, nor expressed a belief that God did not exist (Figure 40).

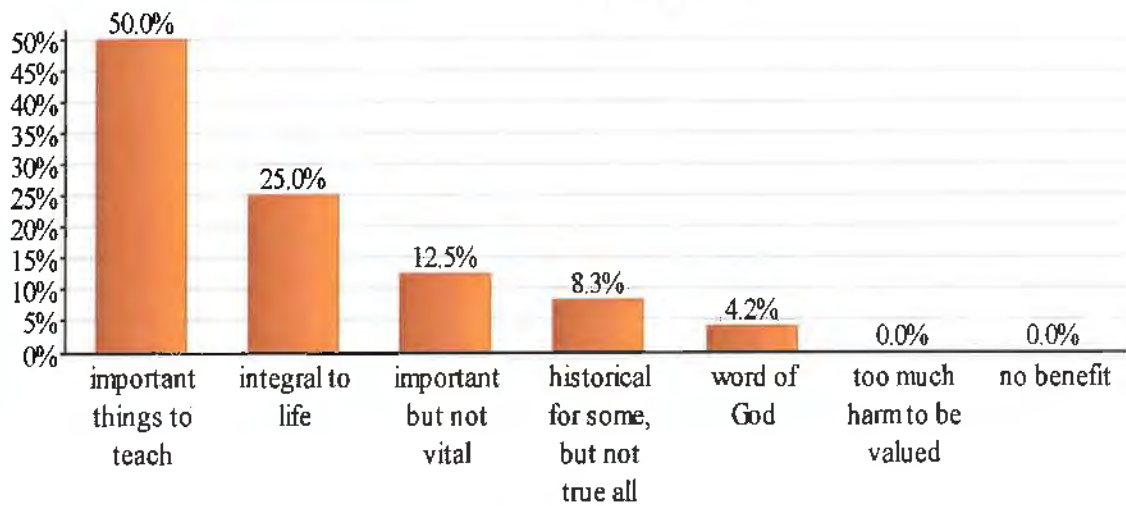


Millennials

Figure 40

When identifying the authority of the Bible in the spiritual life, 50% believe the Bible to have important lessons to teach all people, compared to over 36% overall. 25% identified the Bible as being integral to their life versus 24% in the comprehensive sampling. 12.5% believed the Bible to be important but not vital versus 8.5% overall. Yet only 4% believed the Bible to be the inerrant word of God versus 6.5% overall. A little over 8% believed that the Bible was an accurate historical testament for some but is not true for everyone, versus 7% overall. No respondent believed the Bible to have done too much harm to be valued, versus 8% of all participants, nor did any suggest the Bible has no benefit at all versus 2% for the entire sampling (Figure 41).

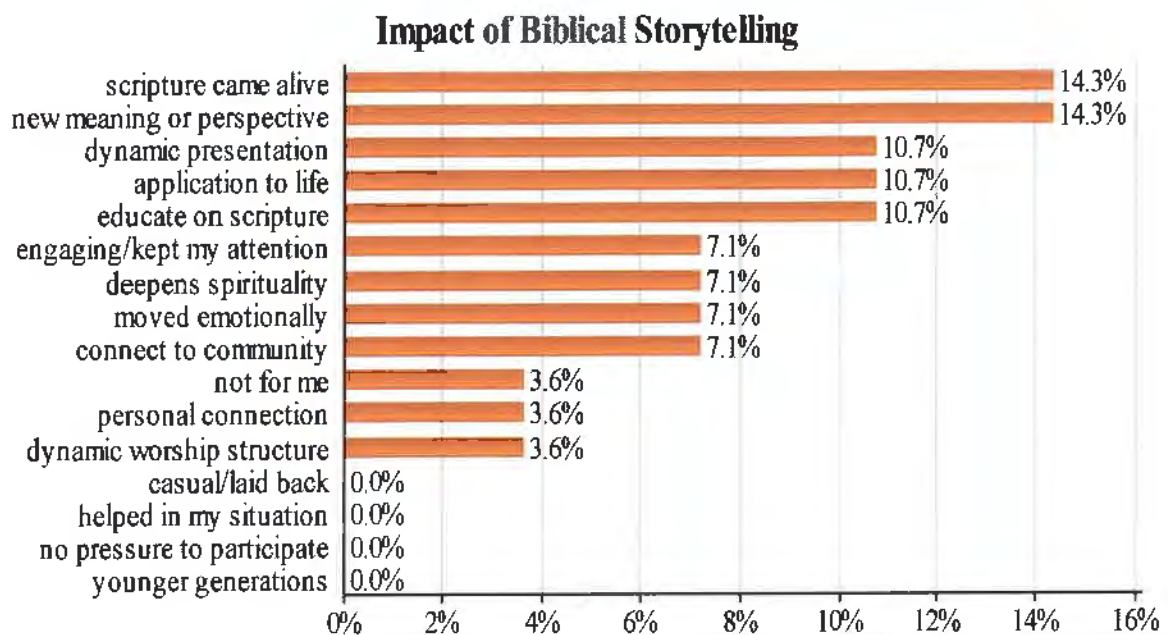
Authority of Bible



Millennials

Figure 41

The areas of highest of impact that biblical storytelling had on Millennials were in the new meanings or perspectives that emerged, and the vibrancy of scripture as a result of the experience. Millennials were also positively affected by the dynamics of the service, their education of scripture, and its practical application to their lives (Figure 42).



Millennials - Figure 42

The most significant barrier to engaging biblical storytelling as a spiritual discipline was lacking the motivation to do it (Figure 43).

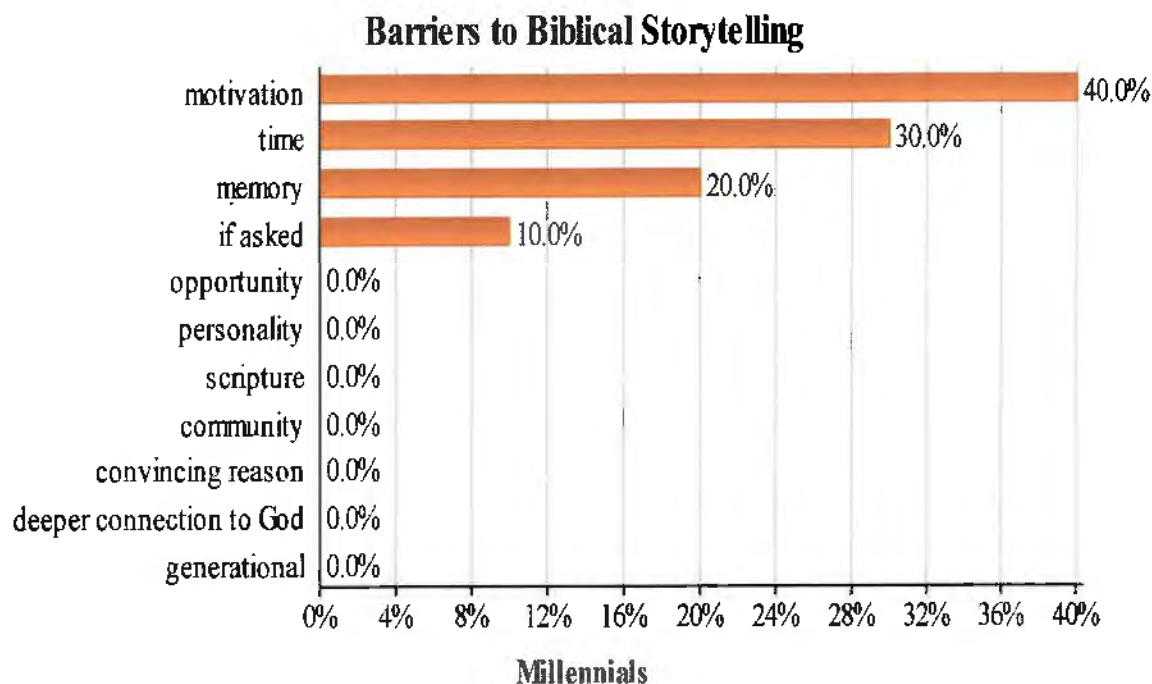


Figure 43

This chapter has presented the data collected during the project's field experience. The chapter also provided reflections of what happened during the implementation of the project. The results of engaging a new paradigm of biblical authority for progressive Christians in the design, implementation and evaluation of an emergent worship experience were explored. The chapter outlined the project's collection of data, analysis of that data, and initial outcomes. Results of surveys, interviews, responses to reflective activities, and phenomenological observations were included.

Chapter eight includes a reflection of this field experience, a summary of the data analysis, the impact of the project on the participants and conclusions drawn from the data analysis. The chapter then connects the biblical storytelling paradigm to the

dynamics of transformative learning and perspective transformation in the medium of a progressive community, and the resulting re-authorization of the biblical narratives from this new meaning-making.

CHAPTER EIGHT

SUMMARY, REFLECTION AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary of Data Analysis

The identification of common themes collected within the data were congruent with the theoretical foundations that identified storytelling as viable alternative dynamic discourse to the traditional presentation of the biblical narratives in a religious context. While the project's goal was a restoration of the Bible's authority as a partner in spiritual formation, the research discovered that the deepening of community trust in the Bible was the most significant impact of engaging biblical storytelling in worship. This community trust developed as participants investigated, observed and studied biblical stories of justice, healing and restoration, and engaged in experimental responses. A performance criticism hermeneutic assisted participants in discerning the ancient audience's original experience of the stories and responded to spiritual questions of inquiry that enabled the making of personal life connections to the biblical narratives.

Participants were invited to interact with the biblical stories and search for new meaning based, not from an ostensive or ideal reference, but by making personal and communal connections from their experience of the stories. This reauthorization of the biblical narrative led to a deeper discernment of their own embedded theologies resulting in meaning from these new experiences. New theologies emerged based on holistic thinking and hypothetical reconstruction. This way of thinking incorporated doubt and a pluralism of perspectives, and was motivated by the desire for synthesis of ideas and

integration of meaning into the community. I discovered that biblical storytelling and a performance criticism hermeneutic was an effective mechanism by which the basic symbols that are tied to the original experience of the revelation from God could emit new meaning in new contexts.

An investigation into the dynamics of storytelling revealed a theoretical framework that is inherently spiritual at its core. The weaving of stories of participants from many spiritual and philosophical paths created mystery and engagement with the subject and themes presented within the biblical narratives. Through the narrative of their own stories participants began to understand themselves. Engagement of the story helped to see, verbalize, and identify hidden messages within their own lives. Participants discovered new meaning within their own stories. This desire for meaning is the originating impulse of story. Seeing our lives as stories is more than a powerful metaphor. It is how experience presents itself to us by better understanding our story, and our various roles in them. We can live more purposefully the kind of life that will give our own story meaning.

Many of the healing powers of story were evident within the biblical storytelling experience as participants were powerfully engaged in the stories. Genuine emotions heated up and came to the surface where the psyche grows ripe for change, and new learning makes a deep impression. The biblical storytelling process, accomplished in this form of community engagement, aroused strong emotions within the participants without violating mutual respect. One of the participants suggested:

Harmony Creek (and Symposium specifically) is one of the few churches at which I've felt any semblance of peace during my search for a new church. After pushing myself to go to a very extreme radical ministry school (which I had idolized for years) about a year ago, I came home before the semester was even

over feeling like I had just walked out of a cult. Most of the foundation of my faith came from that place there and I felt like my faith was in shambles and I've been struggling to piece it back together ever since. However, here I feel like there's actually some hope that I can salvage my faith without sacrificing reason. It is honestly the only place I've been recently where I can engage without fearing that I do not belong and would end up in hell.

Additionally the biblical storytelling service helped identify gaps between some perceptions and reality through education of the participants. This process is often called “paradigm shifting.” The changing of one's paradigm was a transformative result from the biblical storytelling process, producing a better discernment of identity and resulting behavior. Another participant revealed:

Where I work there is a very large Indian population. I work in technology. There's a lot of Indians in the technology field. It seems like they like to stick together and a lot of times they speak in Hindi and eat lunch together. It's like there's a whole subculture. When I first started working there they were very intimidating. I was not sure how to approach them. One by one I started working with different people on projects and different things. After a period of time I got used to working with people. Even to the point where occasionally I would have some folks sit with me at lunch time. One day in particular I was sitting and having a salad that had all this beef in it. I thought, I wonder if this would be a problem in their religion so I asked. My friend said, “No. I understand that you eat meat, I eat chicken but do not eat meat. It's cool.” After just getting to know them they're just regular people and I know them as individuals and not just a group. I can tell now even when someone calls me on the phone and I can tell their voice, they are not all the same. It just took me a while but now it's a lot easier to relate and to deal with them on a one-on-one basis. They're just like us. Our service about the Syro-phoenician reminded me that just getting to know people can make a huge difference. I was forced in my job to work one-on-one sometimes with people. Getting to know them helped me realize they have the same issues in life that I do. It was a learning curve for me. Because I had a preconceived idea that they would not like me or would not want to get to know me, or that they were so different I would not be able to work with them. It's weird to talk about people as a group anymore, cause they're from all different areas of India and even in some of those areas that are not fond of each other. Our conversations around the table gave me a safe place to express my experience. The storytelling helped illuminate the emotions of that kind of interaction, even with Jesus.

Biblical storytelling also provided opportunities for reflecting on conflict, both inner and outer, from an outside perspective as a storyteller. One participant confessed;

When I came in I was angry. Our daughter who is a young adult is struggling with a debilitating illness. We've been having trouble communicating with her doctor getting the follow-up help that she needs. I have been struggling with my anger. I had a sense of this fear that has been going on for quite a while now. I feel like I am struggling to find a normal right now. I am very fearful that I might become bitter and I do not want that. I am also aware that I cannot just be talking about it all the time. So I did not really address it directly in the service, but it was really helpful to be focusing on the spiritual questions in the service and being in community with other believers.

Activating long-term memory was another healing power of biblical storytelling.

This activation of memory occurred through the identification of one's own memory of story related to the biblical narrative. Another participant shared:

Today's theme made me think, when did I first experience unconditional love? I had a very dear friend who was that way—very Christ like, and I started to put her name on the map but then I remembered it goes way back before her. It goes back to my grandmother, my old Catholic grandmother, who sat with her prayer cards and did Lectio Divina every night. She lived in unconditional love and that's what I strive to find all my life—that kind of acceptance and I never really thought about it that way until today. So it was a little thing but it was big for me.

One of the most significant experiences which illuminated the healing power of biblical storytelling occurred when the biblical narrative provided metaphors for explaining interpersonal dynamics. The story communicated something that was invisible to participants and ultimately inexpressible. The story invited communication of perceptions and observations as facts and reality without the danger of being misunderstood by helping to internalize wise, helpful or comforting figures.

The Lazarus story was a great connection for me because my life has been in turmoil for the last two years. I was able to share and help other people understand that Lazarus had to die. It's okay to be in the dark. But we all come forth. No matter how long the dark is, the hope is that when we come forth, that darkness served a purpose, whether we know it or not. So what I took was, "come forth." Over the last two weeks my life has come forth. It was almost prophetic. I had a prophetic coming out of the darkness after that service.

The Lazarus story provided a perspective that connected the divine with the participant, allowing him to see reality in full context, as part of its larger whole. The story gave shape and form to something that was invisible, making the images real and giving emotional reality to the metaphors. Biblical storytelling paradigm also makes it possible for other people's stories to become a part of one's story. Hearing another story can be occasion for profound change. Another participant suggested that:

The exciting thing about Symposium is the interaction around the table where people actually connect with the story. And if you have a great group of people you begin to share and open up. The connection of the congregation and the relationships that get built between that time are important, especially when building community within the church. I would love to see more of mixing people up at different tables each week because the connections are so powerful. The table part helps because as human beings we sit around the table and we think food and people relax. It's a great way to get through to people at a table. It's our comfort area. We break bread at the table, we eat our meals at the table and we relax. It's the end of the work day, we feel fulfilled and our natural memories trigger by sitting around a table. You get that relaxation piece and that is the beauty of the table part.

Another healing power that comes from biblical storytelling occurs when the modeling of alternative attitudes and stances help people cope with their hardship and forge new paths. One participant commented:

I have learned a lot just in the two stories we have experienced. For instance, The famous saying John 3:16 is very important. But until I went to your story telling engagement, I never read or cared to read the verses that followed. The next verses say, "I did not come to condemn the world but to save it." During our table talk the children and me thought that to be interesting. For example, when you go to a Pride parade you will see church people on the sides condemning gays for their lifestyle. But in reading the verse, Jesus tells others that he is not here for condemning. So we talked more about that.

Helping people come to terms with duality, ambivalence, and strife, and to move toward a new perspective on life is another healing power of biblical storytelling. Taylor

reminded us that stories carry meaning. When we view our lives as a story that interacts with other stories, we sense that we are a part of other meaningful events leading to a significant conclusion. The story gives us a context for experiences that are otherwise unbearable. It allows us to name them and then reconcile our lives from a new perspective. A significant example of this occurred when one participant revealed:

That service had an powerful effect on me. In our small group discussion, I brought up the question what does it matter if the glass is half-empty or half-full? Someone gave me the usual kind of response that it's all about perspective. But that was not what I was driving at, and one of my friends caught on to that. It's still half, and half is preferable to empty. Empty is how I feel, and that week in class did not help. Always before, I have been able to connect with people at school, but with the different schedule, it appeared to me that we were all looking out for ourselves, just trying to survive. It was just a continuation of what is going on at home. I am not really connecting anywhere, and I miss it terribly. When I spilled water into the glass, it was just a drop, which is how I felt at that time. That night I had tried to get a group together for dinner and was heading to Perkins alone, when I just lost it. The friend who had caught onto my question in the small group saw me and spent some time ministering to me. Things are still a mess, and I still feel empty as I try to dig myself out of this hole, but it helped to connect a little to someone. And I have a direction . . .

Another healing power of biblical storytelling is its applicability to the collective as well as the intricately personal. In times of trouble people turn to storytelling as a way of exploring fundamental mysteries. Stories allow meaning to be gleaned from individual experiences while at the same time being different for another. When we tell our stories and listen to the stories of others, we experience powerful spiritual realities. Kurtz referred to this process as the “language of recovery.” This kind of language does not involve dogma or doctrine. It's not about things that must be done or truths that have to be believed. It's not theory, conjecture, argument, analysis, or explanation. It is a way of conversation shared by those who accept and identify with their own imperfection. This “language of recovery” makes it possible to see and understand reality differently.

We had a young man at our table who was visiting. He is a college student struggling with some issues. Just to hear him and be supportive of him helped me get out of my own head. It helped me to feel that. I hope that I was able to convey a sense of welcome—that maybe he could sense God's Spirit from the people at his table. It made me feel like maybe God can still use me despite the struggles that I am facing. It made me feel a little bit more like myself, and more fully human. I remember a long time ago when Gilda Ratner was struggling with cancer she said, "I used to feel like Gilda Radner." Well, I used to feel like myself. I used to feel like Carol. But now it's a lot better. Listening to this young man and welcoming him really helped me.

Evidence of Transformative Learning

Spiritual formation is ultimately a self-directed process. This project empowered participants to be authors of their own learning by presenting and providing access to resources that could help them engage in that learning. This type of adult learning resulted in emancipatory and transformative development for many participants through new meaning making. The hermeneutic of "meaning as experience" replaced previous interpretation of the stories (or memories of them) with new perspectives.

This research employed several elements of P. Jarvis' model of self-directed learning to build trust for a collaborative approach for making meaning. There were activities in the project that elicited disjuncture between past and present experiences, engaged interactive communication, provided opportunities for self-determined learning content by a structured method of assessing their own learning. There were opportunities for action and outcome, and a making of new meanings grounded in the shared experience of community. These elements of reflective thinking moved participants to a recognition that knowledge is subjective based on an individual's perception. There was a greater awareness of the validity of different perspectives. However, as Cranton

suggested, to be transformative, reflection has to involve and lead to some fundamental change in perspective. In the project's progressive context, a communal setting was necessary for the development of alternative perspectives—for new meaning-making to occur and then made manifest through new actions or behaviors.

The project elicited new meanings from a variety of activities suggested by Cranton's transformative learning methodology. These included: brainstorming ideas without judgment, identifying the best possible future of how things could be ideally, invention of alternative futures, immersion in a variety of aesthetic and artistic experiences, visualization exercises, self-reflection exercises, hearing about new approaches and perspectives on biblical stories, and engaging in conversations around the table designed to elicit a variety of alternative perspectives. In the final analysis, these new meaning-making activities created new filters, framework, and paradigms that shaped perceptions participants have of themselves, of others, and their surroundings. They were formed in new ways through these experiences. Critical self-reflection helped to shape a new way of assimilating new experiences and identified distortions in participants' old meaning perspectives. These perspective transformation activities examined the content of participants' experiences and provided ways for questioning their embedded theologies and resistance to change.

Reflections on the Biblical Storytelling Experience

The successful completion of the project provided a wealth of data for analysis. In fact, the project was so successful that the leadership of the project's context recommended this unique worship experience continue as part of the church worship

program. This project helped to define an emergent worship paradigm suited well for the progressive context. Participants were asked to engage critical questions for reflection. What is the Gospel? Is the good news the act of telling the story of Jesus? Or is the good news the possibility that the transformation of relationship with God is possible? When does this transformation happen?

The theoretical work of the project informed a “narrative therapeutic” exercise using story sharing. In this process, questions were asked to generate experientially vivid descriptions of life events that were not included in the plot of the biblical story.

Narrative practices separate persons from qualities or attributes that are taken-for-granted essentialisms within modernist and structuralist paradigms. This process of externalization allows people to consider their relationships with problems, thus the narrative motto: “The person is not the problem, the problem is the problem.” So-called strengths or positive attributes are also externalized, allowing people to engage in the construction and performance of preferred identities.¹

Subsequent data analysis identified the ways in which these preferred identities were constructed and performed in the context of the project’s methodology. Transformation of identity occurred through the re-interpretation of the biblical stories from a “meaning as experience” perspective.

The healing powers of storytelling presented in chapter five were manifested in the project through the biblical storytelling paradigm. As suggested there, biblical storytelling teaches listening as well. They also teach us how to dream, how to interpret our own lives and how to interact with others. Biblical stories have taught the meaning of morality, ethics and how to function in society. Biblical stories can introduce us to the skills that we need to resolve problems and develop relationships. Biblical stories are a

¹Michael White and David Epston, *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends* (Adelaide, South Australia: Dulwich Centre Publishing, 1990), 14.

complex assortment of spiritual teachings. When we see our lives reflected in the biblical stories, rather than as an unrelated series of random events, we have the possibility of having significant, purposeful action in our lives. It is difficult for us to see why anything we are or do is meaningful unless we begin to understand our connectedness to the biblical narratives. This connectedness can lead to a deeper construction of meaning with others, with our past, and with our future.

This research revealed an extensive focus in the biblical storytelling narratives on restoring relationships. If separation is the means by which relationships are broken, then reconnection can repair the brokenness. Through the practice of hearing and telling biblical stories, participants discovered and learned to use a new map of relating, which flowed into developing a sense of how they fit into a meaningful whole. It involved first relationships and then identity. They were able to use the biblical narratives to define these relationships, which was their connection to reality and “meaning as experience.”

Biblical storytelling provided a forum for listening to each other’s story and a model for sharing their own stories. In turn, participant became storyteller, and each storyteller became a witness to another’s story. In this environment of storytelling each person was at different times both the teller and listener. The building of trust occurred when these storytellers shared a narrative home, a place where their anomalies of behavior, their ambivalence of thought and feeling, and the indignities of their being—all fit in. In this place they did not look for explanations or causes of behavior. Instead they discovered meaning. The biblical storytelling format revealed what they used to be like, what happened to change that, and what they are like now. This emphasized a process of time resulting ultimately in the healing of the past. By telling of the past at work in the

present, the biblical storytelling paradigm invited a re-creation of self by the self. In presenting themselves as they were, they exercised the right to recover possession of their present-day existence. The critical self-reflection process created space for the healing power of story to emerge, which enabled the basic symbols of our faith to emit new meaning in new contexts. Biblical storytelling was the medium for this transformation by providing a new way of seeing that welcomed the Bible as a sacrament and a conversation partner, and restored its authority grounded not in God but in the Christian community's sacred trust.

At the end of the extended project, participants were asked to describe what they valued most, and what future possibilities for a continuing biblical storytelling experience might look like. The multi-generational aspects of the service were most valued by participants. Seeing youth, adults and seasoned saints sitting around the same tables engaging the same material was an encouraging sign for those concerned about the loss of younger generations from the church. Of particular significance, was the experience of seeing youth taking seriously the challenge of a biblical storytelling paradigm and observing their engagement of "meaning as experience."

Some suggested that the service was perhaps a bit before its time, since some progressive Christians do not want to reform their understanding of faith. They have become used to the pastor telling them what to believe or interpreting the text for them. Perhaps this perspective is generational or a difference in learning styles between adults and youth today. One participant suggested that this style of biblical storytelling should be integrated more into the traditional worship experience beyond just hearing the story, but they should be given the chance to reflect within the liturgy. Some participants

identified the resistance to having to choose which kind of worship they would engage. While there were valuable opportunities to explore the more contemporary dynamics of Symposium, the desire to experience some of the more traditional forms of worship created a conflict of choice. There was a feeling that the service was more of an educational experience than worship by using biblical storytelling as a mechanism to study the stories.

However, the ability to engage in the service based on your own comfort level was important, but not always appropriate for visitors since they are asked to engage right away. It was perhaps outside their comfort level for those visiting for the first time. Its relaxed environment however provided a great space to engage, although an hour is not enough time to deepen the conversations. There was not ample time to finish the conversations that were started. Time flew by, which was surprising for many with traditional experiences of worship. Most participants liked the idea of engaging the experience at a different time so that it is not in competition with other worship services.

Overall, participants were interested in re-launching the service at a different time frame than the other worship services, or as an adult spiritual formation program or a family worship service earlier on Sundays, or even a bar theology group at pub in the neighborhood.

Process Theology as Interpretive Lens for Discerning “Meaning as Experience”

The variety of theological perspectives that drew participants to this project illuminated the problem of identifying a systematic theology from which to evaluate the transformation of the project participants. While the opportunity to advocate for a new

systematic theology that evolves out of the performance criticism paradigm was far beyond the scope of this project, the desire to begin a process toward that end still exists. Naming performance criticism as a progressive hermeneutic for translating the ancient symbols of our faith into digital culture is an important initial step toward that end.

The transformation that resulted from biblical storytelling and the development of “meaning as experience” had distinct yet different impacts on demographic groups in the study. For the silent generation, the processes of making deeper connections to the community and the biblical stories, and learning new biblical lessons by engaging the experience are possibilities for inviting a connection with younger generations that may have significant differences in meaning. For instance, when comparing the areas of highest impact on Millennials, the emergence of new meanings and perspectives and the vibrancy of Scripture as a result of the experience were values appreciated by the Silent Generation. In the evangelical church this is called discipleship. Perhaps these greatest areas of impact for the youngest generations in the survey can be nurtured by seasoned saints who are committed to the future of the church. At the same time the possibilities for Millennials to identify new meanings and perspectives in the biblical story based on their own experience can provide opportunities to expand and reinvigorate the Silent Generation’s view and experience of spiritual community.

Similar impact for Gen Xers included a deepened connection to community and the development of new meaning or perspective from the experience. Engagement in this process had significant impact. While this generation is the fastest growing category of “Nones,” this research bears out new possibilities for invitation to a dynamic experience of worship and spiritual formation. For Baby Boomers the data was also conclusive. In

addition to an increase of connection to community and the increase of the vibrancy of Scripture in response to their experiences, a renewed interest in the practical application of the biblical story to their lives was significant.

An increase in connection to community from the biblical storytelling experience was the most valuable impact for all four demographics. Further research on expressions of this renewed community would provide more perspectives for exploration.

Conclusions: Reauthorizing Scripture for Progressive Christians

As a result of this project, transformative learning occurred from the reconceptualization of the authority of Scripture. We have tended to think of the authority of Scripture as being tied to its value as a source of infallible theological doctrine and of historical facts, which has been undermined by the historical critical investigation of the Bible. We discovered that its claim to being an infallible source of information of what actually happened is not possible. As Boomers shine suggested, “it is not a source of a non-contradictory mutually supplementary systematic theology in which there are no significant differences. There are a variety of theologies in the Bible. The overall impact of that has been to undermine the authority of the Scriptures.”² Rather than focusing on that definition of biblical authority, investigating the Bible as one authorizing source of spiritual formation is a significant return to ancient models of evangelism and discipleship. The biblical stories are but one voice around the table of community formation. The biblical stories are a medium where new dimensions of the self-revelation of God can happen for people. The project’s emergent nature and structure allowed that

²Boomers shine, *Lecture Notes*.

to happen. Inviting people to enter into the stories has re-vitalized the authority of the Scriptures, and when we tell the stories, we become co-authors of the experience.

Another problem addressed in the project was the dissonance that progressive Christians experience with the Bible because of the way it had been used against them in oppressive and painful ways. The mechanism for investigating that was the development of an emergent worship experience using biblical storytelling as a hermeneutic for presenting these narratives in a “meaning as experience” paradigm. This paradigm allowed the progressive audience to disconnect from the stories as a referential document and reconnect to an experience of the story that was transformative for the early church. As a result of this contemporary experience, it was discovered that progressives can experience transformative “a-ha” moments—revelations of God—through the power of story.

Another problem addressed was the ambiguity of the biblical narratives as a source of spiritual formation, which leads to the problem of what holds us together as a community. If we do not need the magic words to be saved, then what about the experience of Jesus is life-giving? How can the biblical narratives be meaningful to me today? I can be a Buddhist if I want community. I can be Hindu or Jewish. These are all communities of meaning. Why do I need to be Christian to have that? The answer to this ambiguity is a vital connection with God through the experience of Jesus.

There were also problems addressed with biblical interpretation. Churches have invested in “meaning as reference” for over 200 years. That interpretation is tied to enlightenment culture. This project addressed the problem of how the Bible is to be interpreted in the context of an emerging new digital culture, of which progressive

Christians are a part. One of the sources of their disconnection is that the paradigm of biblical interpretation has not yielded meaning. It does not have experiential vitality.

Another dimension of the problem was my desire to harmonize my process theological perspectives with the biblical storytelling paradigm. I had not yet developed a practical methodology for the interpretation of the Scriptures that folks in the pew could understand and embrace. While some process theologians have done significant work of integrating Scripture with the basic tenets of process theology (John Cobb, David Lull, Russell Praegent, *Chalice Commentaries for Today, Process and Faith.org*), many clergy and laypeople (at least in the Midwest) are not familiar with its practical applications. More work can still be done to bring these processes into mainstream and mainline congregations. Perhaps my renewed calling for biblical storytelling in progressive contexts will lead me into those possibilities.

And yet another dimension of this research was the problem of contemporary worship versus traditional worship and the development of meaning for digital culture. “Meaning as experience” suggests that we give meaning to that with which we identify as important and relevant. We give meaning to experiences of our own choosing. Therefore, we can choose to give the narratives of Jesus meaning because they represent something meaningful. The stories are meaningful. They make the experience of God known through making the experience of the stories present in our consciousness. It is *our* experience of the stories that are meaningful. In community, “meaning as experience” helps us contextualize a relational God. It illustrates a God who is a part of our everydayness—the God who journeys beside us. That is the good news.

As a progressive Christian I care about the gospel, not because it is factually true or metaphorically illuminating from a “meaning as ideal” or “meaning as ostensive” reference, but because it is true to my experience of God. The difference is I seek out that truth in a community that builds trust through the exploration of its meaning. It is transformative when that experience illuminates a new perspective leading to a new way of being. As the stories are internalized and passionately told in a way that intersects with the community, it leads to a new experience by that community.

It’s like experiencing a Christmas tree. I can observe the tree from two very different perspectives. One perspective is observing the tree perhaps for the first time and not having any experience of what it represents. So I might look at this beautifully decorated Christmas tree and say on the one hand: that’s a very beautiful tree. But why is it decorated like that? The tree in its current state from my current perspective does not have meaning. Or I can look at the tree after having experienced 50 Christmases and immediately connect to the experience of what the tree represents. The tree is not just a beautifully decorated Christmas tree; it is a symbol of what is meaningful to me about Christmas. That meaning comes from my experience of it. That meaning might be the excitement of giving and receiving gifts. It might represent traditions in my family in the past and present, and it might represent beliefs from my Christian tradition. But the key is: my experience of the tree has significance because I give it meaning. If I were suddenly to become Jewish and celebrate Hanukkah instead of Christmas, then the tree may hold some kind of significance, but it would not have the same meaning. And so the gospel is the same way.

The gospel has meaning for me because of my experience of the gospel. It represents more than just a belief system; it represents my experience of the community that interpreted it to me. It holds memories of my family and childhood church, whether it was negative or positive. When my experience of that communal interpretation becomes too negative, painful or no longer relevant, it loses its value. It is no longer meaningful from the earlier experience. I have been transformed by another experience leading to a new meaning, and therefore a new way of being.

And this was the experience of the Jesus stories for the original audiences, the transformation of old perspectives into new meaning. It was transformative because this new meaning led to a new way of being and the formation of a community based on this new identity. Some called this conversion, but it was more systematically transformation of meaning through experience. Hearing and living through the stories changed their experience of the world and their community.

So what does this mean practically? We can recognize now that the effort to reappropriate the quest of the historical Jesus as an interpretive story of Jesus was a retrofit for the needs of the 18th and 19th century. It is now no longer the experience of the digital culture. What was needed, in light of the distance that a hermeneutic of source criticism and “meaning as ostensive reference” has created between the Bible and progressive Christians, was a theological framework by which these original symbols of our faith—the gospel—could emit new meaning in new contexts. The framework for engaging this process was the development of an emergent worship service grounded in a performance criticism hermeneutic. This style of worship recognized the centrality of the processes of becoming and ongoing evolution, and activated internal reformation and growth through

the reclaiming and interiorization of the biblical stories. The identity and presence of persons were radically reformed through the processes of hearing, engaging, discussing, reflecting, re-telling, and witnessing to the reality of God in biblical experience through the application of a “meaning as experience” paradigm. That process was transformational. Individual and communal transformation was the greatest impact of the project.

Chapter nine presents a reflection on the doctoral studies process as transformative learning methodology and its impact on this research. The chapter will explore next steps for continuing this research, and present possibilities for biblical storytelling in the progressive church and digital culture.

CHAPTER NINE

NEW QUESTS FOR AN EXPERIENTIAL JESUS

The Doctor of Ministry Program as Transformative Learning

To be very honest, I was not interested in biblical storytelling initially. I had been working for a year trying to start a new focus group around progressive church renewal. I was interested in exploring digital strategies for helping the local church create digital paradigms for spiritual formation. Dr. Boomershine invited me to join the group as a way of doing this work. The first year in this group I did not know what I wanted nor what to expect. I did not have any goals for doing this work or engaging biblical storytelling. I did not understand it. I liked it but I did not see value in it. Deconstructing theology through historical/source criticism methods in seminary was a process with which I was familiar. While living in that critical paradigm was safe and familiar, it was not life-giving. Yet once I experienced the “meaning as experience” hermeneutic in one of our peer sessions through the story of Peter’s denial, that moment of identifying with Peter was incredibly transformative.

This emotional connection reminded me of my experience in the Pentecostal church. We would sing about our experience of God and our relationship to Jesus, but it was motivated by our need for fire insurance. We needed Jesus so we would not go to Hell. It was emotional and prescriptive, but not appraisive (using Mezirow’s term for “opposite of prescriptive,” see page 106 of this document). Relationship with God was

defined by unworthiness, submission, subservience, acquiescence and conformity.

Resistance was futile. I needed Jesus to be my Savior as a buffer from this angry and vindictive God. If I said the magic words, “Jesus save me,” I did not need anything else.

However, in order to reconcile my identity as a gay Christian, the process of deconstructing that hermeneutic was necessary. Yet I was simply trading a conservative “meaning as reference” hermeneutic for a liberal one. This replacement gave me theological permission to remain Christian, but it did not give me an emotional experience of God. It left me feeling that ministry was just another business, and I did not like that business very much. I traded my emotional experiences—both negative and positive—for cognitive dissonance.

Yet my learning goals transitioned as I experienced relationship with Dr. Boomershine and our focus group. The engagement of biblical storytelling and a pursuit of performance criticism as a viable hermeneutic in digital culture resulted in building a community trust. This building of community trust encouraged me to do the same for participants in the project. Connecting to the biblical stories from this life-giving and emotional experience actually affirmed their uniqueness as individuals. The research discovered that biblical narratives can be transformative for people without demanding a change in their identities as God’s creation—children of God who happen to be gay. A connection to the biblical narratives as referential documents could not provide this affirmation.

The reconstruction process of biblical storytelling and performance criticism allowed me to embrace my gay identity—my authenticity as God's creation—as a valuable way of interpreting connections to the stories. I could see myself in some of

these characters. If I can provide an environment for that to happen in my context, it opens the door to a new way of relating to each other and to the church that is grounded in a relational model versus a hierarchy of truth. We all have a voice in interpreting the truth through our own experience. This new paradigm has changed the trajectory of my ministry and expanded the possibilities of where I can go from here. It has also connected me to my past and my faith. For the first time I value my childhood experiences as a charismatic Pentecostal. I now value what a charismatic experience of God can bring to a progressive theological understanding.

My mentor, Dr. Boomershine, and my peers in the program have also given me great insight into my own spiritual and professional growth throughout this program. They have reflected back to me how I have also grown as a storyteller. The performance art of biblical storytelling is something that I have taken to and has caused tremendous growth in my ability to communicate as a storyteller. That has opened up new arenas and possibilities. Dr. Boomershine called it a “very graphic discovery of my identity as storyteller.”

I have also grown as a thinker. There has been a significant evolution of my way of thinking that integrates experience with theory. A focusing of that intelligence has enabled the integration of a wide range of areas of knowledge, research and scholarship. I've discovered dimensions of my own abilities as a thinker, as a researcher, as a scholar, and as an interpreter of highly abstract theories as well as stories.

A third dimension of my growth has been as an organizer. Pulling together the Symposium project worship service as a community organization was significant. All the elements of persons and processes that I was able to put together and coordinate has

developed my skills as a community organizer in ministry. I have become a “contractor of construction” in the words of a colleague and fellow storyteller.

When the joy of deconstruction is over, progressives still need to construct something meaningful. The emergent worship service was a successful model of engaging people in this quest for meaning. Identifying a solution to the problem of the Bible as being disruptive, while remaining in covenant with a Christian community, was a significant issue to address for progressive Christians. The application of a digital pedagogy was a significant way of connecting to the digital culture. This model explored a new way of teaching and integrating a communal learning experience. Proposing this model as a resource for churches to collaborate on creating new ministries is a way forward for the digital culture.

The most important aspect of this doctoral program has been understanding and employing a transformative learning methodology. The impact of this methodology from the appropriation of what Dr. Lisa Hess calls, “radically covenantal companionship,” has expanded transformative learning in this program from an individual pursuit to the development of an influential community of meaning.¹ In both contexts of this project, this collaborative examination of spiritual formation invited a communal listening for God’s presence that allowed what was heard to create new meaning-making. This spiritual “shaping and being shaped” was experienced by the participants of the project as they embraced whatever realities of self or society framed their perspectives. Hess believes that this kind of communal hermeneutic acknowledges the implications of

¹Lisa Hess, *Artisanal Theology: Intentional Formation in Radically Covenantal Companionship* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009), xvii.

human interdependence and shared human identity that can lead to the fullest expression of the “fellowship-creating reality of Christ’s presence in the world.”²

Congruent with this perspective is Hess’ exploration of the potentiality of artistic expression, and its unique ability to activate transformational learning through self-implication—to alter and inform our conception of the nature and processes of theological learning.³ This form of self-reflection integrates personal dimensions of inquiry with critical reflection. Hess suggests that: “self-implication offers a means for the critique of spiritual phenomena and an honest inclusion of social location and presuppositions into theological or disciplinary inquiry. It establishes a frame which integration does not occur upon conclusion, but is seamlessly a part of critical method.”⁴ During the project, creative and artistic expressions were utilized to explore these dynamics of “performative mode” for theological reflection and transformational learning.

While the expansive nature of Hess’ work on this ongoing research has yet to be explored, some initial thoughts for exploring performative reflection after the project’s conclusion are presented in next steps for research. A motivation for this exploration is grounded in the possibilities of connecting to something outside ourselves through artistic or creative endeavors. Ultimately, biblical storytelling is a creative artistic expression. I did not realize this until I began to reflect on all of my past experiences of the theater,

²Hess, *Artisanal Theology*, 7.

³Lisa Hess, *Learning in a Musical Key: Insight for Theology in Performative Mode* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011).

⁴Hess, *Learning in a Musical Key*, 12.

conflict resolution, music, and dancing—as a way of looking at the richness of my life and seeing its creative potential for spiritual formation.

I am this research paper. I am a product of this doctoral program from a transformational perspective by engaging an “action reflection action” method of critical self-reflection and subsequently making new meaning as a result. Community building impacted our learning, and sharing our spiritual autobiographies deepened our relationship with each other. All of these dimensions helped to bring about paradigm transformation, especially in the midst of inner and outer conflict.

Next Steps for Research

The project was able to model for the progressive congregation a way of being in worship together that honored the critical thinking and the contribution of biblical interpretation that progressive Christians value, and at the same time allowed space for new perspectives and new understandings to emerge. These new meanings were not something we got from a sermon that interpreted the story for us, but in our sharing of our experience of the story and how it connected to our personal lives. It provided a concrete and creative way for people to understand themselves as ministers of the church and interpreters of the biblical narrative. In the United Church of Christ we say we are all ministers to the world but we do not always acknowledge the importance of spiritual formation that takes us there. We often participate in book studies but we resist biblical study because of the Bible’s problematic messages. We like to read other people’s interpretation of the stories but we do not make our own interpretations because we do not believe we are qualified or have enough theological education. This worship service

was a subversive way to introduce spiritual formation for those who are resistant to that. Yet we do like to worship and to be in community—have a cup of coffee with each other. Symposium helped to collapse the familiar traditional worship structure and eliminate those obstacles.

Three potentialities were identified from this research for proposing process theology as “meaning as experience” within the biblical storytelling paradigm:

1. Appropriating this new paradigm of biblical study for making the experience of “God as Presence” known through making the experience of the stories present in the consciousness of individuals and in communal worship.
2. Emphasizing a biblical understanding of God as limited in power—that is, not omnipotent as in classical theism—as foundational for an experience of Jesus’ passion, death, and resurrection, and affirming the power of the Kingdom of God as non-coercive and non-violent.
3. Recognizing the centrality of the processes of becoming and ongoing evolution that can ground internal reformation and growth through the interiorization and performance of biblical stories. The identity and presence of persons is radically reformed through the processes of learning and performing (witnessing) to the reality of God in biblical experience.

These potentialities could provide a “new way of seeing” that welcomes the biblical narrative as a conversation partner in the teaching and practical application of process thought. These didactics can be generative if “experience” is allowed to transform the identification of meaning or understanding. The learner’s tendency to be either self-directed or other directed can be shaped when these conditions or elements are present. I identified these elements and how they were represented in the project in order for the development of emancipatory knowledge, knowledge that is appraisive rather than prescriptive. Knowledge emerges through “a-ha” moments from the experience of these conditions. What transforms us is not an old pedagogy where information is delivered in

a context of learning that we then appropriate into a new perspective. The old biblical critical hermeneutic removes the authority of interpretation. The new pedagogy is about the source and the energy that comes from an interior authority versus top-down authority. It is an emergent way of learning—it is process theology in practice.

There was critique about the worship format because week after week new stories were presented to consider. It was not the best circumstance for new visitors to come and be thrown into a situation where they have to interpret and appropriate the story for themselves. There needs to be other ways to present this experience for introverted people who are not comfortable with an extroverted way of engaging church. I created a process that works for me, but it may not work for everybody so I recognize those limitations.

I am starting a biblical storytelling group in one of the gay bars in downtown Dayton. This could meet the needs of single gay men who are looking for Christian community using the Symposium format without the worship elements to engage the conversations about the biblical narratives. I would also like to launch the same program in a local bar or pub in the neighborhood that is not defined as gay. I will offer a spiritual formation class on Wednesday nights at the church to meet the needs of a more traditional congregant. I recognize that the worship elements may not work for everybody, but the building of community within the project has value in many settings.

I want to experiment with different contexts and mediums for this model so that a mainstream published version of this research would illustrate a variety of different contexts. One doctoral peer suggested that I am an evangelist. That was fun for me because my father was an evangelist. For instance, I want to connect to the theater

community by designing an epic telling that we would perform on Sundays while engaging the stories from a performance perspective. Directing an epic telling by professional actors is evangelism to this creative community. I see the theater community as a mission field. The cast would be my congregation as biblical storytellers, but then giving them the freedom to explore the experience for dramatic emphasis is yet another subversive model for spiritual exploration. Teaching and directing that kind of production could be innovative for the theater and would provide another connection for those “creatives” who have been alienated from the church.

I have also written sermons that were fictional stories about characters in Scripture. I think there is a possible audience for the study of Scripture through creative writing and our experience of it. The narrative experience of what emerges could be a new hermeneutic. It's beyond writing commentary and asks: “what does it look like in narrative form?” Discovery of new meaning about the story was an important impact on the mainline Protestant student demographic. It helped them understand how to write about this new meaning in sermonic form. Expanding the hermeneutic to include audiences from different cultural perspectives would be another dimension.

I also want to look for connections with my colleagues' projects and explore how biblical storytelling can be expressed in a variety of communities of learnings. One possibility could be an edited volume of biblical storytelling in these various settings and expressions. Connecting digital resources would be an important part of this resource, especially with publication and distribution through interactive websites.

The Future of Biblical Storytelling in Digital Culture

The need for reconceiving the authority of the Bible for progressive contexts emerged during the project. While the expected result of the project was the reauthorization of the biblical narratives as essential to spiritual formation, the building of community trust re-conceptualized the authority of the Bible for Progressive Christians of all generations. I believe this re-conception of authorship is vital for engaging spiritual formation in digital culture. The central criterion for the Christian canon was apostolic authority and its connection to the original experience of Jesus. That's why the Gospels have authority. That is what the quest for the historical Jesus tries to undermine. This undermining has created a disconnection to the biblical narratives. For digital culture we need new criteria of biblical authority. Instead of looking at the biblical source critically and discerning if it is original, flawed, or even factual; we must conceive it for digital culture as “what is subjectively relevant for me—my experience.” Subjective experience transforms the old paradigm of authority grounded in one or similar congruent testimonies to an authority that is communal.

A secular example of this is Wikipedia and its evolution as a source of knowledge for the digital culture. Traditional scholars resist Wikipedia as foundational because the authors do not meet certain academic standards. This is communal authority or the accumulated wisdom of the community processed through the digital environment. The authority of the Encyclopedia Britannica was grounded in a trust that the author read everything about the subject, sorted and evaluated the communal wisdom, and is sharing that in the published article. However, Wikipedia is based on a new paradigm that says we do not need to rely exclusively on an individual to do that. As Boomershine believes:

“we can now, in a different way, yoke communal wisdom with a process of engagement that is more authoritative. There is not one individual who is making the decisions about truth or fact, but there is a democracy of communal authority.”⁵ The reason why academic scholarship does not trust the Wikipedia community is because the community is not credentialed the way scholars are. They are defending the source critical model that knowledge comes from sources of information not from experience. The challenge is: how does Wikipedia build trust? It builds trust by becoming the dominant “go to” place for knowledge—not because that knowledge is more correct or more relevant than what is in books—but that knowledge gathers information from experience, which is primary for digital culture. Yet it is also open to change—to being refined. Whereas, when knowledge gets printed in an encyclopedia you cannot change it. If there is new information that arises in the community it can be immediately integrated into the article and revised, and then validated by the community itself. What makes it accessible is that it lives in the cloud and everybody has access to it. There are no barriers to participation. This cloud community has the ability to access this knowledge and influence it. Authority comes not from “meaning as reference” but from “meaning as experience” and everyone’s ability to participate in the experience.

Frei’s *Eclipse of the Biblical Narrative* addressed the cloud that hangs over the biblical critical hermeneutic. Biblical narrative has been covered by a shadow, and “meaning as reference” is that shadow. How do you remove or get through that shadow? The shadow is removed by experiencing the light of the biblical narrative—by allowing the narrative to be experienced anew. This cloud that is covering the biblical narrative

⁵Boomershine, *Lecture Notes*.

can be reimagined as the location for gathering new experiences of the biblical narrative to which everyone has access. While “meaning as reference” has clouded the biblical narrative, “meaning as experience” can move the experience of the biblical narrative into a cloud to which everyone has access. The cloud that shadows is replaced by the digital cloud, the cloud of cyber witnesses—the communal home for testimonies of this new experience. It is the transformation of the “cloud that shadows” to the “cloud of experience.” One of the mystical metaphors is the “cloud of unknowing”—and this unknowing can nourish our thirst for meaning by watering our dry and outdated perspectives with new experiences that are cultivating, life-giving and transformational. This expanding cloud community is the future of Christian formation for digital culture.

The building of community trust during the project invited a new conversation with the Bible. The oppression and disconnection that some communities have used the Bible for was transformed by a new community that welcomed the biblical narratives in new ways—not as a referential document but as an experience of God. In order for progressives to progress in their theology, we need to be able to work out our relational theology in community. We need to model the process in order to make sense of it. In biblical storytelling there's an experience of God that does not happen in socializing or community activities. These are valid and meaningful experiences, but it is the transcendent nature of the biblical story that invites participants into relationship with God through an experience of the story. It's a distinctive dimension of biblical storytelling. It happens in community and therefore develops community trust. But it is also an experience of God. Biblical storytelling is the embodiment of an incarnational experience of God. These biblical stories can guide our quest for an Experiential Jesus.

The appendices (see Contents), located on the DVD, provide documentation of project schedules, worship bulletins, pre-and post-survey questions, social media and multi-media data, facilitator feedback, resources used in the creation of the biblical storytelling worship service (PowerPoint, Lumicon, workshop presentations) and photos documenting the experience. Additionally, a collection of video vignettes of the worship services and project participant interviews are located on the USB Flash Drive. My interactive website, www.ExperientialJesus.com, houses these resources plus additional videos and worship planning ideas for duplicating this project in other settings. Visit this site for multi-media information and resources, and to participate in sharing your own connections to the biblical stories!

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Baffes, Melanie S. "Jesus and the Canaanite Woman: A Story of Reversal." *Journal of Theta Alpha Kappa* 35, no. 2 (September 2011): 12-23.
- Bass, Diana Butler. *Christianity for the Rest of Us: How the Neighborhood Church is Transforming the Faith*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishing, 2006.
- Berthelot, Katell. "The Canaanites Who 'Trusted in God': An Original Interpretation of the Fate of the Canaanites in Rabbinic Literature." *Journal of Jewish Studies* 62, no. 2 (September 2011): 233-261.
- _____. "The Original Sin of the Canaanites." *The 'Other' in Second Temple Judaism: Essays in Honor of John J. Collins*. Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2011: 49-66.
- Bevans, Stephen B. *Models of Contextual Theology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002.
- Bohler, Carolyn Jane. *God the What? What Our Metaphors for God Reveal about Our Beliefs in God*. Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths Publishing, 2008.
- Boomershine, Thomas E. "Biblical Storytelling and Biblical Scholarship." *Network of Biblical Storytellers Seminar*, 2010.
- _____. "From Oral to Literate to Digital Culture." *Lecture Notes*. Dayton, OH: United Theological Seminary, February, 2014.
- _____. *Story Journey: An Invitation to the Gospel as Storytelling*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1988.
- Borg, Marcus J. *Reading the Bible Again for the First Time: Taking the Bible Seriously but Not Literally*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishing, 2001.
- _____. *The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith*. New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 2003.
- Burton, John. *Conflict Resolution as a Political System*. Working Paper, Fairfax, VA: Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, George Mason University, 1988.

- Castle, Michael D. "In the Midst of New Dimensions: A Call for Theological Education in the Churches that Looks to the Historical Jesus to Bridge the Divide Between Academic Understandings and Christian Practice." Doctor of Ministry thesis, Eden Theological Seminary, 2001.
- Cross Creek Community Church. "Mission and Vision." 2012. Accessed November 3, 2012. <http://www.crosscreekchurch.org/about-us>.
- Crossan, John Dominic. *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography: A Startling Account of What We Can Know About the Life of Jesus*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishing, 1994.
- Davis, Donald. *Telling Your Own Stories*. Little Rock, AR: August House, Inc., 1993.
- Fong, Larry S. "New Paradigm's in Mediation: Thinking About Our Thinking." *Mediation Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (Winter 1992): 50-62.
- Federman, Mark. "What is the Meaning of the 'Medium is the Message?'" *McLuhan Program in Culture and Technology*. Accessed January 6, 2015. http://individual.utoronto.ca/markfederman/article_mediumisthemessage.html.
- Fieser, James and Bradley Dowden, eds. "Western Concepts of God." *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Accessed March 15, 2015. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/god-west>.
- Frei, Hans W. *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974.
- Gaster, Theodor. *Oldest Stories of the World*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1952.
- Gulley, Philip. *If the Church Were Christian: Rediscovering the Values of Jesus*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010.
- Gulley, Philip and James Mulholland. *If God is Love: Rediscovering Grace in an Ungracious World*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2004.
- Harmony Creek Church, UCC. *Values and Vision - Cross Creek Community Church*. n.d. Accessed February 3, 2012. www.crosscreekchurch.org.
- Hart, Lawrence. "The Canaanite Woman: Meeting Jesus as Sage and Lord: Matthew 15:21-28 and Mark 7:24-30." *Expository Times* 122, no. 1 (October 2010): 20-25.
- Hess, Lisa M. *Artisinal Theology: Intentional Formation in Radically Covenantal Companionship*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009.

- _____. *Learning in a Musical Key: Insight for Theology in Performative Mode*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011.
- Hearon, Holly E. and Philip Ruge-Jones, eds. *The Bible in Ancient and Modern Media: Story and Performance*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009.
- Iverson, Kelly R. and Christopher W. Skinner. *Mark as Story: Retrospect and Prospect*. Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011.
- Jackson, G. S. "Enemies of Israel: Ruth and the Canaanite Woman." *HTS Teologiese/Theological Studies* 59, no. 3 (2003): 779-792.
- Jenkins, Michael. *Invitation to Theology*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001.
- Kiefert, William C. *The Practical Side of Heaven: 'True' Gnostic Christianity: the Outlawed Logic/Logos Teachings of Jesus*. April 24, 2001. Accessed September 10, 2013. www.gnosticchristianity.com.
- Kurtz, Ernest and Katherine Ketcham. *The Spirituality of Imperfection*. New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1992.
- Le Donne, Anthony. *The Historiographical Jesus: Memory, Typology, and the Son of David*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009.
- Le Donne, Anthony and Tom Thatcher, eds. "Introducing Media Culture to Johannine Studies: Orality, Performance and Memory." *The Fourth Gospel in First-Century Media Culture*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2011.
- Lee, Kukzin and Francois P. Viljoen. "The Healing of a Canaanite Woman's Daughter (Matthew 15:21-28)." *Acta Patristica Et Byzantina* 20 (2009): 77-88.
- Lee, Margaret Ellen, and Bernard Brandon Scott. *Sound Mapping the New Testament*. Salem, OR: Polebridge Press, 2009.
- Litherland, Janet. *Storytelling from the Bible*. Colorado Springs, CO: Meriwether Publishing, Ltd., 1991.
- Maxey, James A. and Earnst R. Wendland. *Translating Scripture for Sound and Performance*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012.
- McDonald, Margaret Read. *The Storyteller's Start-Up Book*. Little Rock, AR: August House, Inc., 1993.
- McLaren, Brian D. *A Generous Orthodoxy*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004.

- Meade, Erica Helm. *Tell It By Heart: Woman and the Healing Power of Story*. Chicago, IL: Open Court, 1995.
- Mel, D. B. "Jesus and the Canaanite Woman: An Exception for Exceptional Faith." *Priscilla Papers* 23, no. 4 (2009): 8-12.
- Moore, Robin. *Awakening the Hidden Storyteller*. Boston, MA: Shambhala, 1991.
- Ohio Conference, United Church of Christ. "Constitution and By Laws." Report, Cleveland, 2001.
- Ong, Walter J. *Orality and Literacy*. New York: Routledge, 1982.
- Patterson, Stephen J. *The God of Jesus: The Historical Jesus and the Search for Meaning*. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998.
- Peters, Ted. *God, the World's Future: Systematic Theology for a New Era*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000.
- Progressive Christianity.org. "The 8 Points of Christianity" 2011. Accessed January 12, 2015. <http://progressivechristianity.org/the-8-points>.
- Rhoads, David. "What is Performance Criticism?" Accessed January 6, 2015. Chicago, IL: Lutheran School of Theology. www.biblicalperformancecriticism.org.
- Rhoads, David and Joanna Dewey. "Performance Criticism: A Paradigm Shift in New Testament Studies." *From Text to Performance: Narrative and Performance Criticisms in Dialogue and Debate*. Cambridge, UK: Lutterworth Press, 2015.
- Rukundwa, Lazare S. and Andries G. van Aarde. "Revisiting Justice in the First Four Beatitudes in Matthew (5:3-6) and the Story of the Canaanite Woman (Mt. 15:21-28): A Postcolonial Reading." *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 61, no. 3 (2005): 927-951.
- Sanders, Debra. *Identity and Conflict*. Working Paper, Washington D.C.: George Mason University, 1996.
- Schon, Donald A. *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1987.
- Schwartzentruber, Michael, ed. *The Emerging Christian Way: Thoughts, Stories, and Wisdom for a Faith of Transformation*. Kelowna, BC, Canada: CopperHouse, 2006.

- Shiner, Whitney. *Proclaiming the Gospel: First Century Performance of Mark*. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003.
- Shinn, Roger L. *Confessing Our Faith*. Cleveland: United Church Press, 1990.
- _____. "The United Church of Christ Tomorrow." Edited by D. Johnson and C. Hambrick-Stowe. *Theology and Identity: Traditions, Movements and Polity in the United Church of Christ*. Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1990.
- Spong, John Shelby. *A New Christianity for a New World: Why Traditional Faith is Dying and How a New Earth is Being Born*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001.
- Stegall, William. "A Perspective from Process Theology." *The Process and Faith Program of the Center for Process Studies*. Claremont, CA: Claremont Theological Seminary, 1994. Accessed 1/24/15.
<http://www.ctr4process.org/about/process/GodUniverse.shtml>.
- Suchocki, Marjorie. *God, Christ, Church: A Practical Guide to Process Theology*. New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1982.
- Swanson, Richard W. *Provoking the Gospel*. Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2004.
- _____. *Provoking the Gospel of John: A Storyteller's Commentary*. Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2010.
- _____. *Provoking the Gospel of Luke: A Storyteller's Commentary*. Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2006.
- _____. *Provoking the Gospel of Mark: A Storyteller's Commentary*. Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2005.
- _____. *Provoking the Gospel of Matthew: A Storyteller's Commentary*. Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2007.
- Swartz, Barry. "What Difference Does the Medium Make?" *The Fourth Gospel in First-Century Media Culture*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2011.
- Taussig, Hal. "Grassroots Progressive Christianity: A Quiet Revolution." *The Fourth R* (May– June 2006). Accessed January 12, 2015.
<http://www.sdc.unitingchurch.org.au/WestarProgressiveArticle.pdf>.
- Taylor, Daniel. *The Healing Powers of Story: Creating Yourself Through the Stories of Your Life*. New York, NY: Doubleday, 1996.

- The Flip Side. "Soul Play: What Is Progressive Christianity Exactly?" Accessed December 23, 2014. <http://www.flipsidepress.org/content/soul-play-what-progressive-christianity-exactly>.
- Tickle, Phyllis. *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and Why*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008.
- Treat, James. "The Canaanite Problem." *Daughters of Sarah* 20, no. 2 (1994): 20-24.
- United Church of Christ. "Open and Affirming in the UCC." Accessed December 30, 2012. <http://www.ucc.org/lgbt/ona.html>.
- White, Michael and David Epston. *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends*. Adelaide, South Australia: Dulwich Centre Publishing, 1990.
- Wink, Walter. *The Bible in Human Transformation: Toward a New Paradigm for Biblical Study*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1996.